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Cultural Confusions: Oral / Literary Narrative Negotiations in Tracks and Ravensong

by

Bradley Neufeldt ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Comparative Literature

Department of Modern Languages and Comparative Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1997

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Degree: Masters of Arts

Year this Degree Granted: 1997

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **"Cultural Confusions: Oral / Literary Narrative Negotiations in Tracks and Ravensong"** by Bradley Neufeldt in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature.

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Abstract

Native American Literature can be read as a site of cross-cultural exchange between indigenous oral traditions and European literary genres. Consequently, it can then be viewed as a means of cultural transmission for Native cultures which once relied only on oral traditions. Using works by two authors — Tracks by Louise Erdrich, and Lee Maracle's Ravensong — this thesis examines how features of an oral tradition may be represented in the literary genre of the novel. In using literary forms formerly foreign to Native cultures, these two authors have adapted motifs and themes into literary forms in ways that challenge inscribed concepts of literature and canon. I provide a perspective on the critical dilemma presented by the term *Native Literature* by examining this issue in regards to: <a> oral and literary expression, <b> ethnographic and anthropological records pertaining to the cultural backgrounds of the authors, and <c> literary criticism. My central question is: What narrative strategies do these two authors employ in Tracks and Ravensong in negotiating a textual space between an oral traditional culture and a literary one?

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank two people in particular: Professor Kay Stone, friend and teacher, who opened by ears to the world of oral storytelling and without whose initial encouragement I would not have started this project. I also would like to thank Mari Sasano for her encouragement and generous comments and help in preparing the final draft of this thesis. Thanks are also due to: Professor M. Dimic for his encouragement and advice given during the writing of this thesis; Professor M. Chapman for her generous criticisms; Professor P. McCormack for her positive encouragement critical questions.

May 1997

Brad Neufeldt

Table of Contents

Chapters	pages
Introduction: Negotiating These Textual Spaces	1-12
Chapter One: Contested Spaces	13 - 36
Chapter Two: Spoken Words / Written Spaces	37 - 56
Chapter Three: Narrative Penetrations	57 - 76
Chapter Four: Ensuing Silences	77 - 96
Chapter Five: Rereading Native Literature	97 - 115
Works Cited	116 - 129

Introduction:

Negotiating These Textual Spaces

"Many moons comechucka . . . hahahahahahahahahaha."

"Perhaps Hawkeye should tell the story."

"Perhaps Ishmael should tell the story."

"Perhaps Robinson Crusoe should tell the story."

"I'm okay now," said the Lone Ranger.

"Do you remember how to start?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Can we begin?"

"Yes. We should begin."

(King, Green Grass, Running Water 13)

Negotiating These Textual Spaces

There is a growing critical awareness of North American Native authors who use literature to preserve, explore and transmit their cultures. When N. Scott Momaday won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for House Made of Dawn, it may have seemed as if people began to sit up, take notice and say: "Oh! Native people can write." They can, and they have been writing for some time. Penny Petrone's works Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present (1990) and First People, First Voices (1991) have documented articulate and literary Native voices of the previous century to the present. Writers like E. Pauline Johnson and D'Arcy McNickle are just two of many who were writing at the turn of the century. Today writers like Tomson Highway, Thomas King, Jeanette Armstrong, Louise Halfe, and Ruby Slipperjack are part of a growing body of Native writers who are not only adding to the corpus of Native literature, but are questioning the entire category.

Native literature might be read within the context of a North American literary tradition that attempts to assimilate cultures that might otherwise escape literary containment motivated by a dominant culture's need to determine and control legitimate political and social issues. Consequently, much of the discussion of Native literature and Native oral traditions might be perceived as being articulated in a manner that silences interactive discourse. Native literature and oral traditions can then be perceived merely as the material that they embody. For example, During a July 1996 visit to Oregon I visited the High Desert Museum near Bend, Oregon and viewed an exhibit of Native American crafts being exhibited as art. It is here that the paradoxical nature of this thesis as a project becomes

clear. The striking thing about this *Native exhibit* was its wide depiction of a variety of cultures, Aleutian, Tsimshian, Sioux, Ojibwe, Nez Perce and so on, all under the label of Native American. These are cultures which have been, and some continue to be, reliant on oral traditions. But especially disturbing about this exhibition was the manner in which each individual piece displayed *objectively* with a small placard detailing its cultural origin. No information was given about who had previously produced and owned these *artifacts*, how they had been used, or who had collected them. They had been reduced to *artifacts* — objects to look at and admire for their aesthetic beauty. Put behind glass, these artifacts were no longer a part of any social interaction or engagement for which they had been made. And the stories that they might possibly be heard to tell were silenced.

But the debate over who defines Native literature and Native identity is not voiceless. If, as Walter J. Ong and others have argued, the historical development of a European literary tradition grew out of European oral traditions and early literary efforts to document oral folklore, then it might also be argued that the development of *Native literature* may owe a debt to the early endeavors of such scholars as Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Marius Barbeau to document indigenous oral cultures of North America. But some of them had Native partners; notably, William Beynon (of Nisga and European upbringing[1]), a collaborator of Barbeau's is now acknowledged to have been an excellent anthropologist in his own right. Such an example may challenge any conception of Native peoples as inarticulate merely because they may have not maintained a literary tradition on their own. As well, the examples of early Native writers like Pauline Johnson, D'Arcy McNickle, and others demonstrate that Native peoples were not illiterate. In his essay "'This Volumnous Unwritten Book of Ours': Early Native American Writers and the Oral Tradition" (1996)

[1] The preface to Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I (1987) notes that little is known of Beynon except that he was the son of a Nisga woman and a White trader whom Barbeau hired as a translator for his first Tsimshian field season in 1915 - 1916 (VI).

William Clements argues that while some early Native American writers like Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin, a Lakota) and George Copway (an Ojibway) may have adopted European and Euroamerican literary models the influence of an indigenous oral tradition can be observed in their writings.

> Indigenous oral traditions, particularly storytelling, had an effect on many Indian writers, even those who wholeheartedly adopted Euroamerican, Christian values. Although some of them may not have shared the deep sense of continuity between their own writing and the literatures of their communities that a contemporary author such as Silko articulates, many nevertheless drew on oral tradition and perceived their writing in relation to it. (123)

Scholars such as Penny Petrone, Dennis Tedlock, Dell Hymes, Howard Norman, Julie Cruikshank, and writers such as Paula Gunn Allen, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Thomas King, and others have acknowledged this point in various ways. They have challenged the ways in which readers, teachers and students perceive and read Native literature.

But how does one begin to identify and access those aspects of literature that draw on oral tradition? While I have trained as an oral storyteller in various capacities and have a practical understanding of the dynamic process of storytelling, this does not give me access to the oral traditional epistemologies portrayed in Native literature. Within any given culture, the dynamic aspect of an oral tradition operates according to social and ritual codes that are difficult to convey in a printed text. Oral traditions are constituted by both a body of material that is transmitted and by a social process that transmits them. The social performance aspects of traditional oral texts do not easily translate into print and so there is a paradox in using literary records and anthropological or ethnological documents to identify oral elements

in a literary text. But because oral traditional material has often been transliterated into print there is some justification to the concern of how oral traditional material may be represented in literature, specifically in the literary phenomenon that has come to be known as *Native literature*. The matter of who is telling, who is listening and the *hows* and *whys* of oral storytelling is not necessarily dissimilar to the matter of who writes and who reads. So both literary and oral traditions can also be perceived to embody living social processes.

Another paradox is that the term *Native literature* is both an enabling category in that it allows for the discussion of a broadly identifiable group of people, and at the same time it ignores the cultural distinction of the variety of cultures that make up this category. This points to the difficulty that such a thesis raises. Neither Louise Erdrich or Lee Maracle are Cree, Ojibwe, Annishinaabe, Métis, Tlingit, Tsimshian, etc. The term Native has a tendency to subsume the distinctions that each of these specific Native cultures exhibit. Yes they are Native, but they are not the same. The narratives that they produce — literary and oral, historical, biographical, novelistic, or poetic — do not always rest quietly in such homogenizing categories, and the discourse that surrounds literature produced by Native peoples in such a context challenges such expectations. They should not be put behind glass with a little placard telling the viewer who and what they are. The glass might get shattered.

In adapting aspects of oral cultures to the needs of literature, novelists like Louise Erdrich and Lee Maracle write in such a way so as to challenge a homogenous conception of Native identity and Native literature. Their novels might be read to pose such challenges by exhibiting features of an oral tradition intertwined with the literary genre of the novel. But in making this thesis a literary case study, I have been reduced to using print materials to corroborate cultural aspects of an oral tradition that can be read in Tracks and Ravensong. This somewhat contradictory application may be justified: in using literary forms formerly foreign to Native cultures, these two authors have adapted Native motifs

and themes into literary forms in a way that may challenge notions of them as being examples of an uncontested and culturally neutral literary form. For example, if the novel is considered to be merely an extended fictional narrative, then Tracks and Ravensong most certainly fit in this category. But this glosses over the variety of characteristics that have distinguished the many incarnations of the novel in its history. Throughout its development various forms of the novel have been identified: the realist novel, the magic realist novel, the historical novel, the social novel, the epistolary novel. Such identifications of form tend to box specific examples into one or another category and do not account for those examples which do not fit easily into any specific classification. Tracks and Ravensong while they rely on elements of history, realism, the fantastic, and make social and political commentary, also combine features that are culturally specific. Ultimately, these two novels are much more than the sum of these categories.

But these are rather large issues that deserve more consideration than I can bring to them here. Rather, I wish to focus on just one small area of the discourse that surrounds Native literature, and how it might be read as a site of cross cultural exchange between indigenous oral traditions and European literary genres. Two particular novels, Louise Erdrich's Tracks (1988) and Lee Maracle's Ravensong (1993) not only provide fictional representations of aspects of an oral tradition, but have intertwined them into the literary genre of the novel in ways that make them difficult to read unambiguously and identify certain feature of the novels as strictly literary or oral features. My central question is: What narrative strategies do these authors employ in negotiating a textual space between an oral traditional culture and a literary one?

In examining Tracks and Ravensong, I am providing a perspective on the current critical dilemma presented by the term *Native Literature* by examining issues of: <a> oral and literary expression, <b> ethnographic and anthropological records pertaining to the

cultural backgrounds of the authors, and <c> literary criticism. I have relied on the following assumptions:

1> To identify cultural characteristics of oral features within a literary text requires a knowledge of (or at the very least a sensitivity to) the culture being depicted, the background of the author, or both. At the same time, dominant concepts of the novel are primarily European in origin, at least insofar as it has been studied and critiqued within the environment of academia.

2> An *oral tradition* involves both performance and commentary in which the teller acts as mediator, interpreter, and critic to an audience that may be questioning and interjecting. Literature which attempts to represent the social interaction and performance of an oral tradition may exhibit such features as polyvocality and multiple narration, or even narrative silence. Similarly, I will argue that in Tracks and Ravensong might be read to present a struggle of voices competing with each other; a contest of stories or story versions.

3> In literature an *oral tradition* must be signified within the conventions of a written textual mode. Differentiations in stylistic form, metaphor, or narrative action are made syntactically, creating a narrative paradox. Oral storytelling then becomes a feature of literary representation which is active within the narrative being advanced.

4> Literature can be a colonial tool that silences an oral culture. But literature can also be a site of cultural assertion and resistance. To consider Native American Literature as more than ethnic folklore or marginalized ethnic literature calls for a realization that it may challenge such perceptions of literature itself. Or, as Walter Ong states in Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1986): "We - readers of books such as this - are so literate that it is very difficult for us to

> conceive of an oral universe of communication or thought except as a variant of a literate universe" (2). The reverse of this is also possible - literature can be read as a variation of an oral universe. Such an admission makes room for critical literary discussion based on literary theory and on a sensitivity towards indigenous culture and perspective.[2]

This thesis is written in five chapters, each dealing with a specific problem or question pertaining to *oral literature* and *Native literature* in general, and specifically to Tracks and Ravensong.

"Chapter One: Contested Spaces" is an examination of how Tracks and Ravensong are examples of *oral literature* and *Native literature*. These terms are problematic due to the hybridity of cultures that they embody. On one hand, these novels are part of the transmission of oral traditional material, albeit within a literary culture. But to study them as examples of oral literature is to locate them within a contradictory category that denotes spoken texts that have been written. There is then a tendency to locate oral texts and literature that borrows from traditional oral material as merely a variant of a mainstream, "culturally advanced" literary practice. On the other hand, if *oral literature* is a category that subsumes the distinctive characteristics that mark some texts as oral, the terms *Native* and *Native literature* are equally problematic. Such terms tend to homogenize or erase cultural and racial distinctions so that Cree, Salish, Tsimshian, Ojibwe, Mohawk, etc. are then subsumed under the general category *Native* or *Indian* . And this category may not fully account for another equally problematic perspective of hybridity that is denoted by the historical use of terms like Métis, Half Breed, and Half Blood to describe those people who

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[2] It must be noted that Ong makes use of a rather *presumptuous* "we" which catches him in his own paradox. There is an embedded assumption that people who operate in an oral world do not read. He seems to draw an impassable wall between oral and literary epistemologies. This assumes that "we" are at the centre of the universe and that those who are not part of "we" naturally wouldn't or couldn't also be a part of "us".

were not fully *Indian* or European. Generally, such writing produced by peoples of "pure" Native blood, or mixed blood, is also then subsumed in the general category of *Native literature*. Even to classify Tracks and Ravensong by such terms places them in terms that are defined by literacy, even as they may challenge such boundaries. And yet, by writing them, Erdrich and Maracle have also placed their novels within the problematic literary discourse of *oral literature* and *Native literature*.

The representation of traditional oral material in Tracks or Ravensong is part of a larger context of literary, historical and even anthropological documentation of Native cultures. "Chapter Two: Spoken Words / Written Spaces" is an examination of how two anthropological texts represent material of oral traditions: 1) Life Lived Like a Story (1990) by Julie Cruikshank, Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned; 2) The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems From the Swampy Cree Indians (1976) by Howard Norman. Cruikshank's collaborative work represents the life stories of three Athapaskan elders in such a way that defies what might be thought to define a "strict notion of 'biography'" (2). Genealogy, mythological stories, and songs are interspersed with personal histories in such a way as to interrupt a normal cause and effect narrative (or, in narratological terms, *fabula*[3]). Norman's book is an effort to represent typographically the structural features that characterize an oral text: pitch, intonation, volume, repetition, as well as the story text itself. But these two examples are ultimately just representations of story texts, not necessarily the social and cultural acts in which such texts are orally transmitted.

On the other hand, the narrative strategies that Erdrich and Maracle have used are distinct from those employed in anthropological documents. Tracks and Ravensong provide fictional representations of storytelling events that might be read to present the act

[3] *fabula* - This is a technical narratological term the refers to the set of narrated situations and events in a chronological sequence. It might also be understood as a linear

of narration as the subject of cultural struggle and negotiation between competing cultural epistemologies — those that transmit knowledge orally versus those that package it in writing. These novels then present a fictional representation of the paradoxical situation in which Native peoples must adopt categories of meaning and representation that convey a literary ideology that demands a "written" history or biography. Tracks and Ravensong may then fictionally explicate the same pressure that non-Native and Native scholars, researchers, and writers may themselves feel to adopt the structures of various disciplinary and literary discourses that violate cultural and community sanctions and taboos, all the while trying to preserve those cultures. This may often be contrary to the articulation of their own stories and history because such a that process transliterates oral material into print seems to move it beyond the control and sanction of the community that originally possessed the oral material in question.

"Chapter Three: Narrative Penetrations" is an examination of how Louise Erdrich's Tracks can be read to represent elements of an oral tradition through a contest of narratives. The narrative struggle in Tracks is then a literary space in which speaking voices, Nanapush's and Pauline's, struggle to shape and control the story being presented. These two tell their stories and, in doing so, demonstrate opposing perspectives and ideological roles that open up what might normally be perceived as a monological narrative. Nanapush is an oral storyteller whose narratives can shape his reality around him. Pauline is a voyeur whose distanced gaze seems to lock her into the margins of her own narration. But a reader is forced to break down such an unambiguously structured reading because of inconsistencies in the characters of these narrators and their attempts to penetrate each other's narratives. But where are these inconsistencies in character and narrative penetration located? Nanapush does not always abhor a world of print as he says he does,

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story line of all the major significant elements of a given narration (Prince, 30).

and Pauline is not always as invisible as she might appear. So when Nanapush tells a Trickster story to Pauline, tricking her into giving up her penance of restricted urination, he acts outside his own narrative frame. What initially appears to be a struggle for narrative control ends up being an unresolved tension between different ways of knowing.

"Chapter Four: Ensuing Silences" is an examination of how Lee Maracle's Ravensong represents features of an oral tradition through acts of narrative exclusion. Lee Maracle is very conscious of ritual traditional[4] elements of ceremony, myth, tale and song. As a creative writer she is aware of the hybrid cultural space that she creates by incorporating such elements into her writing. Ravensong appears to present elements of a West Coast Native oral culture. But what is noticeable about this hybrid space are tensions between what is actually narrated and that which is not narrated, but only implied. Ravensong presents figures of West Coast Native tradition (most notably the Trickster Raven) or creates narrative dramatic scenes where storytelling events are clearly seen. But the reader is not allowed to hear the story, and instead only sees its telling take place. This points to a question that is of more significance: *What does such a narrative strategy force me, the reader, to do?* There is a sense in which Ravensong demands that I construct or reconstruct an *oral* event from a written text which has been deliberately arranged to evoke just such a reading. The result is an ironic displacement of the reader who must fill in those narrative gaps, or recreate the missing element of a storytelling event, the content of the story itself.

"Chapter Five: Rereading Native Literature" looks at the points of similarity and dissimilarity in Tracks' and Ravensong's narrative strategies. Both novels present communities in a struggle to survive the loss of stories and memories as the people who contain them die or succumb to the pressures of cultural assimilation. And both novels

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[4] Within literary criticism the terms oral tradition and ritual tradition often appear to be used interchangeably. My sense is that oral tradition is a broader category that refers to general

challenge hierarchical arrangements of their narratives and begin to combine what some might regard as diametrically opposed discourses — literary and oral traditional. Such narrative fluidity challenges any perceptions of *Native literature* in which narratives are read with linear perceptions of the past and present, and social and cultural facts are fixed and homogenizing. Instead, both novels create a social-cultural context in which a story cannot be separated from its context. This indicates that perhaps a more open way of writing about (and not just a recategorization of) Native literature is needed.

It is perhaps more appropriate to read Tracks and Ravensong as examples of narrative interaction in which a hybridity of literary and oral cultures occurs. But reading any aspect of an oral tradition through the imposition a literary perception without understanding something of the dynamics of that tradition is to box it in and make it into something else. If I claim, then, that Tracks and Ravensong challenge commonly accepted notions of narrative and storytelling, it would be inappropriate to say that they can be read from only that one perspective. In reference to these two novels, I examine how the adjustment required of vairous reading perspectives can be demonstrated with reference to protest literature, Magic Realism, a Bakhtinian assessment, and the more classic narratology represented by Lanser, Chatman and Genette.

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cultural orature including ritual and ceremonial texts as well as everyday speaking practices.

Chapter One:

Contested Spaces

One day a story will arrive in your town. There will always be disagreement over direction - whether the story came from the southwest or the southeast. The story may arrive with a stranger, a traveler thrown out of his home country months ago. Or the story may be brought by an old friend, perhaps the parrot trader. But after you hear the story, you and the others prepare by the new moon to rise up against the slave masters.

(Silko, Almanac of the Dead: A Novel 578)

Contested Spaces

Louise Erdrich's Tracks and Lee Maracle's Ravensong contain oral and literary narrative features that some readers might find hard to identify because they often escape the containment of a literary tradition that seems obsessed with establishing a correct perspective on this issues of genre, narrative, culture and race. These two novels can be read in the context of a debate that surrounds discussions of literary appropriation and Native identity, particularly with respect to the issues of racial and cultural differences. Native literature might be viewed as an example of a geography that is difficult to map because its topography contains historically complex forms of meaning and identification. It is a space that is not easily negotiated but one that is often contested. In "DisseminNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (1994) Homi Bhabha identifies this as a *cultural contestation* or *war of position* in which "[d]esignations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always 'incomplete' or open to translation" (162-3). I will address this issue directly with respect to the following two terms: "oral literature" and "Native literature". Academics, both Native and non-Native, have contested both these terms and there is a general acknowledgment among them that they are problematic. Should these two novels, Tracks and Ravensong, be located within the categories of oral literature, or Native literature? In asking this question my intention is not so much to answer this question as to demonstrate the problems that the use of such terms creates.

Oral Literature?

The representation of oral traditions within Tracks and Ravensong not only presents oral texts, but presents a way of knowing such texts that is outside the boundaries of literary narrative. But these novels are also part of the epistemology of North American literary tradition that would perceive good literary narratives to be those which adhere to the demands of writing. Such a literary practice easily transliterates oral material but may not so easily represent the social processes that transmit such material. Then the term *oral literature* is caught up in contradictions that are brought about by the combination of the terms *orality* and *literature*. Such terms allow readers and literary critics to gloss over the sometimes obvious and sometimes subtle differences that exist between oral traditional cultures and literary cultures. In Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word (1982), Walter J. Ong dissects the term *oral-literature* in an attempt to resolve its inherent contradictions. From his perspective a distinction between types of texts should be made. He emphasizes the etymological meaning of the word *literature* , texts that are written, while texts from an oral culture might be more properly termed *preliterate* (13). But Ong admits that this presents orality as an anachronistic deviant of literature: Readers are so literate that it is difficult for them "to conceive of an oral universe of communication except as a variant of a literate universe" (2).

And so the very idea of studying written texts which have oral features embedded in them points to the greatest weakness of much of the critical work that is done on oral traditions. As technological media, print and writing have demonstrated a tendency to absorb and assimilate oral traditional material. While Native authors and critics write, participating in a literary tradition that might be seen to assimilate their cultural forms of expression, they struggle to validate and maintain an awareness of their oral cultures. (Oh the irony!) Even as I attempt to discuss Erdrich's and Maracle's novels and the oral

traditional elements within them, I am working within the virtual reality of the written word. To categorize Tracks and Ravensong as examples of oral literature places them in a contradictory world that attempts to account for both oral and written texts, but on terms that are defined by literacy.

In spite of its inherent contradictions, this oxymoronic term, *oral literature* , continues to have currency and has also slowly infiltrated the arena of literature and its criticism[1]. And implicit in its continued use is a need to account for the transmission of knowledge, story and narrative that lies outside a literary conception of text. A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff, Literatures of the American Indian (1991), deliberately states that, "In this book, the term *literature* refers to both oral and written works" (13). On other occasions she uses the term *oral literature* to produce the very contradiction to which Ong objects. But in such cases she distinguishes between "literature" which is written and "literature" which is performed — oral literature: "[i]n addition to the large body of oral literature that survives and continues to be performed today, American Indian literatures also includes works written in English by Native American authors since the late 18th century" (17). Likewise, in her essay "Metalanguages" (1989), Elaine Jahner also makes use of the term. In examining N.

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[1] The problem of defining identity, who speaks and listens in the context of literature, is not particular to the issue of Native American literature. In his book African Literature, African Critics (1988), Rand Bishop discusses the development of African literature as a product for European consumption and the culmination of a desire to have African literature produced for and defined by an African readership. The fact that in the 1940's and 50's European literary criticism regarded African literature through categories having little to do with, if any awareness at all of, indigenous African culture became a particular sore spot for African critics and writers such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Alioune Diop, Amos Tutuola, and Chinua Achebe. Bishop discusses their efforts to apply indigenous traditions as a standard for the development of an indigenous literary tradition and literary criticism. In particular, he takes note of Ben Obumselu's arguments on the problem of characterizing works by the racial origin of their authors while still giving credence to their use and influence by oral and literary traditions that are identified to be African (71). Bishop concludes his chapter "The Making of a Literary Tradition" by acknowledging that, while the invoking of indigenous African traditions helped to identify elements that have been used as critical standards for the discussion of African literature, alone it did not define a literary tradition.

S. Momaday's novels and his autobiography, The Names (1976), against a global context of literature and literary criticism, she distinguishes between those texts which are written and those that are told, while still leaving room for interaction between these two types of texts. "These examples of oral literature, having been told by people whom he knew, whose intonations of voice echo in his memory, become literary evidences of longing incarnated and personalized" (162). The continued use of *oral literature* has led to the formal application of this paradoxical term to Native literature. And yet this term has been used to categorize a wide variety of orally derived written texts: ethnographic records, genealogies, märchen, folktales, heroic ballads, songs and so on.

Historically, the instances of interaction between oral and literary traditions are not new and not restricted to the issue of Native American literature. It has been demonstrated that early anthologizers and users of oral folklore material participated in a process of literarization. Such endeavors of documentation gave birth not only to the literary fairytale but also to the disciplined study of folklore. It is now widely acknowledged that, in Kinder- und Hausmärchen (1812, 1815), the Brothers Grimm did not leave the folklore material they recorded untouched. Their attempt to find an *Ur-Märchen* was motivated by nationalistic and cultural concerns. Furthermore, it was based on an assumption that the material which currently existed in the oral tradition was corrupt and needed to be uncorrupted. In their view, human memory unaided by the material technology of writing and printing would have been insufficient to transmit and maintain oral text over many generations without degradation.[2]

[2] This might create the impression that oral / literary interaction began with this example, but there is a host of literary material from European and non-European cultures that also deserves to be mentioned. Beowulf, the Ramayana and the Upanishads, the epic of Gilgamesh, and The Bible have all been considered by some to exhibit features of oral traditional material.

While they are regarded by many to be largely responsible for the birth of the study of folk-lore and folk literature, the Brothers Grimm themselves were preceded by the efforts of earlier *recorders* of oral material. While it is clearly a literary work, Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales depicts a whole world of storytelling. It is quite plausible that in writing he relied in part on oral material. Leonard Koff, in Chaucer and the Art of Storytelling (1988) points to this aspect of The Canterbury Tales by stating that Chaucer's

> retelling - the actual writing of a manuscript and the performance of it - is thus, in some measure, dedication to old stories; retelling stories preserves them by making them known again publicly ... (37)

More recently, Milman Parry (The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry, 1971) and Albert Lord (The Singer of the Tale, 1960) attempted to prove that the relationship between form and narration found in recordings of Yugoslavian folk epics could be used to demonstrate the oral roots of The Iliad and The Odyssey.

In France, such oral / literary interactions are said to have given birth to the genre of the literary fairytale. The verse tales of Charles Perrault, such as 'La Belle au bois dormant' (Sleeping Beauty) and 'Cendrillon, ou la petite pantoufle de verre' (Cinderella) in Histoires ou Contes du temps passé. Avec des Moralitez (1697), appear to have been set down more or less as they were heard (Opie, 26-7). This would have been different from the context of a literary salon of the time in which fairy tales were regularly presented for entertainment. Madame D'Aulnoy, who is said to have maintained such a salon, published four volumes of fairytales between 1696 and 1698 (Zipes xix). Something of an innovator, D'Aulnoy's use of fairytale motif and structure is exemplified by *The Island of Happiness* , embedded in her novel L'Historie d'Hippolyte (1690). But Jack Zipes claims that it was the translation and adaptation of The Thousand and One Nights (1704-17) into

French, by Antoine Galland, that led to the institutionalization of the genre "literary fairytale" (xix-xx). Contributors to this category of the literary fairytale or Kunstmärchen as it is also known are numerous: Rousseau, Voltaire, Goethe, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Ludwick Tieck, Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll, Yeats, Mark Twain, Rilke, Hermann Hesse, Stanislaw Lem, Jane Yolen, Angela Carter, Tanith Lee, and the list goes on.

Similarly, in North America the development of the phenomenon of known as Native literature might also be tied to early efforts to document indigenous oral traditions that might die out if unaided by the technology of writing and printing. In North America, the interest of anthropologists (such as Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, Karl Kroeber, William Beynon and Marius Barbeau) in Native American languages and oral culture coincided, ironically, with a popular belief that the days of the American Indian were numbered.[3] There was an ensuing rush to document these cultures before they were lost. The recent publication of Marius Barbeau work on Tsimshian culture Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I (1987) is an excellent example of oral traditional material. It provides an excellent overview of Tsimshian oral traditional material and the variety of narrative variants that are possible. But it is still a treatment of an oral tradition that does little to account for the social processes involved in the transmission of these narratives, except to provide a date of the recording, the identity of the informant and the recorder.

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[3] In his book The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture (1992), Daniel Francis documents how at the turn of the century this belief was propagated and maintained in media of film, literature, popular culture of wild west shows and carnivals, and by the political policies of the governments of the time. He documents several examples; painter Emily Carr, policies enacted by senior official in the Indian Department (and poet of Confederation) Duncan Campbell Scott, and government attempts to eliminate an "Indian" presence at the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede and Banff Indian Days. Francis argues that the governments of the day propagated statistics showing the disappearance of the "Indian" all the while enacting policies of assimilation.

Whether Barbeau was aware of these distinctions I cannot say. It is interesting to note the original collection of this material at the Canadian Museum of Civilization consisted of both narratives and analysis, but the analysis was eliminated from this publication in favour of the editors' priority to publish the narratives themselves.[4]

More recent documentation of Native oral traditions tends to acknowledge the social and cultural aspects that are involved in the transmission of oral traditional material. Howard Norman's The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems From the Swampy Cree Indians (1976) and Where the Chill Came From: Cree Windigo Tales and Journeys (1982), or Julie Cruikshank's Life Lived Like a Story (1990) are examples that I will discuss in "Chapter Two: Spoken Words / Written Spaces". And the ongoing interest in such aspects of Native North American cultures is also evidenced by the works of Dennis Tedlock — Traditional Literatures of the American Indian: Texts and Interpretations — (1981), Dell Hymes — "Discovering Oral Performance and Measured Verse in American Indian Narrative" (1977), In Vain I Tried To Tell You: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics (1981) — Penny Petrone — Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present (1990), First People, First Voices (1991)— and the list goes on. These works question the ways in which the "North American literary tradition" (and here I use this phrase in its widest possible sense) has successfully represented Native American

[4] Another tragic and poignant example of the documentation of Native American culture that I have encountered is Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America (1961) published by Karl Kroeber's wife, Theodora Kroeber. This biography is a documentation of the man, Ishi, coming to terms with a *civilized* world and cannot be considered an anthropological documentation of oral traditional material like the work of other cited here. And yet, such a text is problematic in its portrayal of Native peoples becoming extinct. Rather, it is the story of Ishi the walking and talking artifact. Ishi's primary residence at the Museum of Anthropology, University of California in San Fransisco, relegated him to a position of 'living artifact' of a culture all but extinct. Kroeber's book characterizes Ishi as the last surviving representative of the wild and untamed Yahi, an oddity in a civilized turn-of-the-century California. The reader might gain some perspective on his

oral and literary traditions.

The representation of Native American oral traditions has not always been positive. In the history of Native North American and European encounters, indigenous oral tradition has suffered in an environment where literacy and the printed word have certainly been valorized. But this continuing process of literary appropriation does not go uncontested. Emma LaRocque, in her preface to Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada (1990), makes a distinction between literacy and orality similar to Ong's. But, in advancing her argument, politicizes the issue of literacy / literature in terms of its genocidal impact.

> [Of] course, the written word is advanced as superior to the spoken word. Oral traditions have been dismissed as savage or primitive folklore. Such dismissal has been based on the self-serving colonial cultural myth that Europeans (and descendants thereof) were / are more developed ("civilized") than Aboriginal peoples ("savage"). (xvi)

Native literature was silenced as a consequence of being declared voiceless by the *supremacy* of those endorsing literacy. Within an oral tradition the generational transmission of material might be seen to obscure an individual as sole author / originator of a text (and in some cultural contexts, sole possessor). In a literary tradition such anonymity is not usually tolerated.[5] While Thomas King appears to agree with the basic tenor of LaRocque's statement, he uses the contradictory term oral *literature* to challenge the conception that Native oral literature represented in print is merely an artifact. He

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material existence, but Ishi's own voice remains a screaming silence.

[5] In a print based culture I would argue that such textual anonymity is a construction of a literary need to co-opt texts that do not easily conform. Such a perspective erases the social and ritual dynamics that contain and transmit oral texts. This issue will be covered more in

voices his argument in more positive terms by claiming that Native oral literatures are linked to an extant and viable culture which continues to survive and prosper. In his introduction to All My Relations (1990), he states:

> There is the misconception that Native oral literature is an artifact, something that vanished as an art form in the last century. Though virtually invisible outside a tribal setting, oral literature remains a strong tradition and is one of the major influences on many Native writers. (xii)

Such perspectives on the history of interaction between Native Peoples and Europeans question a simplistic one way vision of assimilation processes of non-Western subjects. In her book Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory (1993), Julia Emberley also contests a simplistic perspective of assimilative processes by attempting to show how written and oral narratives by Native peoples resist the easy categorization that terms like *oral literature* and *Native literature* might otherwise produce (22-3). She locates the conflict of cultural appropriation within contentious geopolitical and cultural borders where "the distorted 'truth' of official histories, however much they are corrected through a critique of their politics of representation, is still endowed initially with a privileged narrative of 'truth' over the historical 'fictions' produced by resistance writings" (22). Examining the literary discourse surrounding the stories concerning a slave woman (Thanedelthur) of the Hudson Bay Company records, Emberley states that Native oral material is *made to orbit around the solidity of European 'writing practice'* : "In relation to a European record of Truth, oral traditions are perceived to be ephemeral instabilities, verbally disseminated and relying on memory as a record of history" (115). Native history, whether it be oral or literary, even

when viewed as being more historically correct, or valid, is still not given a place of priority over those texts and documents it may write against. But, Emberley identifies *this* as the site of a productive struggle where Native oral practices can break through the boundaries of a *written ideological containment* (93).

Similarly, in his article "Myth, History, and Identity in Silko and Young Bear: Postcolonial Praxis" (1993), David Moore sees technological literacy and recorded sound operating as essentialist and dualist colonizing agents only if we buy into them. In other words, readers and writers are part of a literary economy and have an appetite for literature that is exotic or has the appearance of novelty. But for Moore, the economics of exchange in the history of contact and non-opposition concerning Native and European interaction questions the assumed assimilation processes of non-Western subjects and the assumed lack of agency on the part of indigenous Americans (381). Then the post-colonial concern for agency within subjectivity for the Native person, artist or otherwise, becomes a question of being colonized — agency within subjection (373).

Moore reads Young Bear's The Invisible Musician (1990) as an example of an oral - literary juncture embodying a struggle for cultural survival (375). Similarly, in Ceremony (1977) storytelling is a means by which the reader might enter the experiences of Silko's characters and their cultural struggles (371). With respect to authors Young Bear and Silko, Moore discusses the question of agency between a culture and its contemporary moment. He sees both authors as modeling dynamic identity which is an "alternative" to the essentialism of modernism and post-modernism. In other words, in the past, North American aboriginal peoples were not any more or less powerless than Silko and Young Bear are now; they just made certain decisions under certain conditions that yielded certain results. Likewise, Tracks and Ravensong can also be read as examples of narrative negotiations yielding their own

unique results. Thus, by writing Erdrich and Maracle make a political investment in the other — literacy. At stake is the identification of what is Native and what is not Native and how these terms are defined. This, then, points to that second problematic term *Native Literature*.

Native Literature?

Labeling Tracks and Ravensong as *Native literature* according to the Native origins of their respective authors locates them in a homogenizing category that is no less tied up with contradictions than the term *oral literature*. The use of the term "Native" can be seen to ambiguously embody a criteria of race that employs categories of inclusion and exclusion. In her preface to Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada (1990) Emma LaRoque makes such a racial identification in her criticisms of the racial politics in the publishing industry when she says: "Publishers, including editors and Journalists, turned to white authors to speak on our behalf" (xvi) She objects to the inclusion of some voices and exclusion of others because one might be White or Native. LaRoque uses the term "White" to culturally identify authors like Rudy Wiebe, George Ryga, Robert Kroetsch or W. P. Kinsella. But such authors are no more "White" or European than Erdrich or Maracle are Native or Indian. Rather, they all have distinct cultural identities within such broad categories. Rudy Wiebe is Mennonite and I have read that Erdrich is Ojibwe and that Maracle is Métis and Salish. (As for Ryga, Kroetsch and Kinsella, I will not speculate as to their cultural identity from the etymology of their names.)

In the same way the term *Native* implies an ambiguous homogeneity because it has often been used to define cultural identities on too broad a scale. Behind the use of such a term there is the expectation that "Native" writers should write and speak about certain issues, use the same symbols and mythologies. As Kateri Damm says, in "Says Who: Colonialism, Identity and Defining Indigenous Literature" (1993):

> in some ways pan-Indianism and other such simplistic generalizations become self-fulfilling prophecy: some of what we share is the result of having been treated in similar fashion, as if we were one people. (14)

Such generalization allows readers to perceive a large body of literature produced by indigenous North American writers as if they come from the same culture or geographical place, regardless of the fact that some are Sioux, some Cree, Ojibwa, Tsimshian, Tlingit, Nez Perce, Zuni, and so on. And so, regardless of the fact that the terms "Native" and "Native literature" may present such ambiguous generalizations, they are terms that must be discussed and questioned. Emma LaRoque writes:

> categorizing literature on the basis of ethnicity, gender, or politics raises the spectre of ghettoization. While one must be supportive of both Native literature and Native studies, one must be concerned about ghettoization because of its effects on Native writers and writing. (xviii)

It is ironic then that such a ghettoization is often made according to the criteria of an all consuming definition of what Native is when such a homogenizing category may in reality be meaningless.

So how is a definition of *Native literature* constructed, and if it is connected to strands of literary hegemony and the history of colonialism and nationalism, should it be used at all? In The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture (1992) Daniel Francis examines this issue with respect to the idea of "Native". He argues that the idea of *Indian* has been the product of non-Native fears, aspirations and desires. What is thought of as Indian is the creation of a cultural imagination that knows very little about the indigenous cultures that it has largely displaced. "Through the prism of White hopes, fears and prejudices, indigenous Americans would be seen to have lost contact with reality and to have become 'Indians'; that is, anything non-Natives wanted them to be" (5).

Terms like *Native*, *aboriginal* and *Indian* imply a homogeneity of culture that, to some extent, cannot be avoided, especially when discussing the homogenization of a culture. In

"How (!) is an Indian?: A Context of Stories" (1993), Jana Sequoya addresses some of the contradictions inherent in the study of Native American literature which result from the social, political and economic conditions surrounding the struggle of *Indian* identity. She examines how aspects of literary identity can be at odds with a more traditional tribal ethos. Thus she reads Momaday's House Made of Dawn (1968) and Silko's Ceremony (1977) as contemporary examples of a hybrid form of Native American storytelling and North American literature that mediates across cultural traditions. This may involve a betrayal of origins from which they derive their status as Native writers, but ironically it also helps to maintain a continuity with those origins.

> [B]oth *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* might be considered not only as contemporary examples of Native American storytelling (as direct manifestations and transformations of the continuity of those traditions), but also in the more ambiguous light of the overlay of one set of social values by another. (464)

Thomas King also questions the whole idea of labeling a body of literature as *Native* . He critiques the concept of *Indian-ness* as "a nebulous term that implies a set of expectations that are used to mark out what is Indian and that which is not" (1990, xv). To define Native literature on the basis of race makes a rather bold assumption "that the matter of race imparts to the Native writer tribal knowledge of the universe, access to a distinct culture, and a literary perspective that is unattainable by non-Natives" (1990, x). As Thomas King notes in his introduction to All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction (1990), what constitutes Native literature is difficult to define precisely in the literary space where the race of an author and the critical discourse defining that space meet:

> It should be said at this point that when we talk about contemporary Native literature, we talk as though we already have a definition for this body of literature

> when, in fact, we do not. And, when we talk about Native writers, we talk as though we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not, when, in fact, we don't. What we do have is a collection of literary works by individual authors who are Native by ancestry ... (x)

This presents a problematic Racial ambiguity: there are writers who are Native by birth, but not by upbringing, and non-Native people adopted and raised as Native. Politically this matter is further confused by a Canadian Indian Act which, up until 1985, declared that Status Indian women who married non-Status Indian men or Non-Natives (and children thereof) were no longer legally Indian. The result is a people of mixed racial origins whose lack of official status might also indicate the presence of hybrid cultures that also lack validation, but which has been identified by terms like métis, half-breed, mixed-breed, etc.

So, if I assume that Erdrich and Maracle are Native, am I inadvertently and unavoidably placing them in a category that subsumes their cultural differences. Culturally they exploit both literary and oral cultures and inhabit more than just a *Native* world. But categorizing Tracks and Ravensong with respect to Erdrich's origins as Ojibwe and Maracle as Métis, may place these novels just one world. In his essay "What is an Author?" (1984) Foucault writes that "[t]he coming into being of the notion of 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences" (101). He questions what constitutes a work: a text's relationship to its author, in contrast to a text's form or structure? He focuses on the "point we began to recount the lives of authors rather than heroes" (101). The aspect of author discourse — appropriation / ownership of texts — now means that the name of an author "performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse assuring a classificatory function" (107). Names of authors become tools in the similar sense that folktale typology has been applied to the classification of oral traditional material. It can be argued that *Native literature* which

draws on an oral culture buys into this as well. Once readers are aware that a particular novel is written by a Native author, they can then try to access that cultural information perceived as being relevant. Louise Erdrich is Ojibwe. Knowing this, I can now go to literary sources of information on Ojibwe culture. By extension, her writing can now be considered as part of a literary corpus that portrays Ojibwe culture. But, this ethnic categorization does not rest easily when I consider that Erdrich is of *mixed* heritage. Ethnically she be perceived to be both German and Ojibwe. Should I then consider German cultural influences, even though Erdrich writes in English and not German or Ojibwe? Ethnic categorization is no less complicated concerning Lee Maracle, who is of Métis and Salish background.[6] To place Tracks and Ravensong in one or another of these categories to the exclusion of the others becomes a questionable endeavor.

Like the term *Native*, terms that denote hybridity may also subsume or homogenize cultural differences. The very fact that Erdrich, Maracle, and Thomas King, utilize mixed modes of expression, of literary *and* indigenous oral origin, demonstrates a problematic hybridity of cultures. Such authors are popularly received as producing mainstream and innovative literature. Yet, if these authors are to be referred to with terms like Métis, Mixed Blood, or Half Breed (linguistic genealogical manifestations that denote a hybrid culture or race) then their writing might also be seen to cross the cultural boundaries that might be perceived in the terms Native, or Native literature. Like Maracle, Thomas King crosses the boundaries of Native cultures. He is of a mixed background of Greek, German and Cherokee, but his novels Medicine River and Green Grass Running Water depict contemporary Blackfoot culture that might be observed in southern Alberta or Montana.

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[6] Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Literature (1990), edited by Agnes Grant, has listed Lee Maracle as Métis and Salish (338).

Regardless of their mixed racial background, any literary hybridity produced by Erdrich, Maracle and King can be read to result from Canadian and American mainstream literary traditions and specific Native cultures which may not necessarily be their own. Thus, the cross-cultural perspective illustrated by such writing introduces complications bound to the term "hybridity" that are similar to those produced by the term *Native* or *Indian*.

And yet, such terms also point to the possibility of being doubly marginalized. People who inhabit the space of cultural or racial hybridity may be stigmatized by both the dominant culture and an indigenous one. As much as they are part of both, they are part of neither. In her autobiography Halfbreed (1973), Maria Campbell documents how her people, the Métis, or *Road Allowance People* as she refers to them, were reduced: They became squatters on their own land to be eventually displaced by white settlers brought in by the local *Land Improvement District Authorities* (12). Conversely, Métis had a difficult time in the Native community to which they also were related.

> We all went to the Indians' Sundances and special gatherings, but somehow we never fitted in. We were always the poor relatives, the *awp-pee-tow-koosons* [7]. They laughed and scorned us. They had land and security, we had nothing. As Daddy put it, 'No pot to piss in or a window to throw it out.' They would tolerate us unless they were drinking and then they would try to fight, but received many sound beatings from us. However, their old people, our 'Mushooms' (grandfathers) 'Kokums' (grandmothers) were good. They were prejudiced, but because we were kin they came to visit and our people treated them with respect. (26)

[7] The footnote to this term in An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English (1992), defines *awp-pee-tow-koosons* as half people (139). The Cree - English / English - Cree Dictionary: Nehiyawe Mina Akayasimo - Akayasimo Mina Nehiyawe - Ayamiwini - Masinahigan (1995) defines *Abbitawokosisan* as Métis, halfbreed, mulatto. (1, 336)

Here the construction of racial difference between Métis and Native (in this case Cree) and Métis and White Settlers functions to exclude the Métis from either group.

In Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory (1993) Julia Emberley makes note of how such prejudice maintains categories of inclusion and exclusion in a literary context:

> If the hegemonic management of genre / gene boundaries is not maintained, the result, as Derrida notes, is the production of "an internal division of the trait, impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation, or degenerescence". (164)

She objects to the application of a post-structuralist literary criticism that abstracts indigenous knowledge to maintain such boundaries. Instead Emberley claims that hybridity can be a metaphor of cultural exchange. "The Mestiza, thus, becomes an exemplary figure of a fertile political and cultural discursive territory in which to explore metaphors such as hybridity and difference" (158). Relying on these assumptions, Emberley goes on to argue that such hybridity permits the reading of textual agonism as a mode of resistance and terrorization of authority and colonial pressure that define the terms of inclusion and exclusion. So while terms like Mestiza / Métis are as contentious and problematic as *Native literature* or *oral* literature, they promote continual deformations creating positions of ambiguity from which to challenge and question binding notions of cultural and racial identity.

> The figure of the Mestiza is in many ways comparable to that of the Métis in Canada. The figure of the Métis is also made to contain the racial ideology of mixed-blood (Ojibway / French, Cree / Scottish) as well as functioning as a figure for theories of cultural crossover ... (158)

By extension, the racial tension of terms like Métis, Mixed Blood and Half Breed can

function as critical metaphors not just for cross-cultural exchange but also for cross-cultural creation. Native literature as a hybrid form is then neither Native nor English literature, but it represents a challenge to notions of both genres as the novel —the Native novel or the English novel. This is perhaps where the problematic terms *oral literature* and *Native literature* meet — in a hybrid space that is not quite oral traditional, indigenous nor literary.

While Native authors may write and create in a language that is historically not their own, they do not leave it untouched. Authors and literary scholars, Luci Tapahonso, Paula Gunn Allen, N. S. Momaday, Joy Harjo, Tomson Highway, Thomas King, and Leslie Marmon Silko are just a few examples of Native people who "...know how to read, know how to write. There is no upper strata of the English language that is beyond their grasp" (Birchfield, 203). But each of these writers facilitate cross-cultural creation in distinct ways. As Penny Petrone has documented concerning Tomson Highway in her book Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present (1990):

> [n]ot fluent in English until his mid-teens, [Tomson] Highway writes the first draft of his plays in Cree, a language that has no gender distinctions. Because his culture's dominant mythological figure is a trickster clown who is a very sensual character, the language can be both hilarious and visceral. The possibilities of language are very important to Highway who has said: 'I love playing with words — the sound and sensuality of syllables, the feeling and images and meaning. (173)

In his own way novelist Thomas King, in Green Grass, Running Water (1993), uses the Trickster to critique and rewrite a Judeo-Christian view of creation. And Leslie Marmon Silko, in Ceremony (1977) and Almanac of the Dead (1991), recreates Trickster figures that challenge the geographic or social boundaries which marginalize indigenous cultures. Specifically, Tricksters in indigenous cultures are antagonistic to fixed and authoritarian boundaries. The minute that people think they have one figured out, boxed in and packaged

by a set of categorizing terms it will invariably tear up the package. It's in their nature.

In The Sacred Hoop (1986), Paula Gunn Allen examines this from a mixed perspective of what she calls *tribal- feminist* knowledge and euro-academicism. For her, the Native American novel is a means of repossessing a cultural identity defined by ritual and sacred understandings and maintained within a respective oral tradition.

> [These] novels [are] most properly termed American Indian novels because they rely on Native rather than non-Indian forms, themes, and symbols and so are not colonial or exploitative. Rather, they carry on the oral tradition at many levels.... (79)

Such writing becomes part of the tribal oral tradition from which it draws[8]. Allen claims that, in such novels, cultural conflict becomes a major theme of bi-culturalism. She claims that protagonists in such novels are caught in the effects of colonization and the loss of identity and yet are also participants in ritual traditions shaping their lives (79).

Yet, Allen seems to contradict herself, later stating that "If the oral tradition is altered in certain subtle, fundamental ways, if elements alien to it are introduced so that its internal coherence is disturbed, it becomes the major instrument of colonization and oppression" (225). In his book Keeping Slug Woman Alive (1993), Greg Sarris accuses Allen of replicating what she set out to criticize: the patriarchal tendencies that suppress a Native power and subjective presence in their texts. In The Sacred Hoop, Allen presents a Keres

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[8] What Allen appears to be arguing for is an understanding of Native Literature that emphasizes the dynamic social aspects that distinguish *oral* or *ritual* texts. Consequently, I use *text* as a term that can refer to both oral and printed material. While printed texts can be referred to as literature, oral texts involve both performance and commentary in which the teller acts as mediator, interpreter, and critic, to an audience that is often questioning and interjecting. The social elements which distinguish a text as being oral are: (1) the informers who told specific writers and recorders their stories, (2) the cultural and ritual roles of such texts, and (3) the audience interaction. To call such a text *oral literature* is to create a paradox which refers to literature that represents the oral feature of a dynamic and socially interactive narrative.

Yellow Woman story, *Sh-ah-cock and Miochin*, collected by John Gunn. Allen provides three interpretations of this tale: "A Keres Interpretation" (232-34), "A Modernist Feminist Interpretation" (234-37), and "A Feminist-Tribal Interpretation" (237-40). She states: "The oral tradition is a living body. It is in continuous flux, which enables it to accommodate itself to the real circumstances of a people's lives" (224). Even as Allen makes this claim, she undermines it by creating a homogeneous vision of what is Native, what is tribal, and what is an oral tradition. These interpretations are stated as generalizations which close out those voices she is trying to represent. Sarris points out that in transcribing such tales into English Gunn Allen did not account for its natural ritual storytelling nature, and that she subsumes their individual voices in her own textual representation (Sarris, 126). In this case I am inclined to agree with Sarris when he states:

> [w]hile Allen opens important and necessary discussions about American Indian women and their written literatures which make a significant contribution to American Indian and feminist scholarship, she, perhaps inadvertently, closes discussions with those women and the texts she sets out to illumine. (126)

So, *whose* voice and *which* Natives is she representing? "In creating and presenting multiple points of view, how might Allen as creator / writer of these points of view, have diminished the complexity and the power of those points of view?"(Sarris, 1993, 127 *fn* .). In Allen's case, then, if the voices being represented are not allowed to contest the representation of themselves, she is making the same imposition which she claims to be criticizing.[9] And so, she seems to maintain a static view of what constitutes Native literary

[9] The issue of narrative voice in Native literature will be discussed in "Chapter Two: Spoken Words — Written Spaces" with respect to Julia Cruikshank collaborative work Life Lived Like a Story (1990) and Howard Norman's The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems From the Swampy Cree Indians (1976).

and oral traditions, inadvertently homogenizing the very cultures she wishes to validate, boxing them into textual representations appropriate to her own stated assumptions.

Thus, the dilemma presented by the terms *oral literature* and *Native literature* is that of a highly contested textual space. While drawing from their own culture, Native authors place themselves within the cultural continuity of an oral tradition and a North American literary tradition. This dilemma is a place of paradox in which the capitalism of a cultural environment participating in the production of literature and literary criticism may also be providing a cultural revitalization to combat such a threat: fighting fire with fire, so to speak. Native literature can then be read as a response to the threat of cultural extinction caused by both academic and commercial capitalism. But such writing may also co-opt oral and sacred cultural spaces, representing a violation of community rites and taboos. As Jana Sequoya argues in "HOW (!) IS AN INDIAN?: A Contest of Stories" (1993), literature, is an individual writing and reading act effaces communal sanctions of sacred oral material:

> Because for the most part neither the university nor the mainstream reading public has regarded ethical considerations as relevant to the category of fiction, critical commentary has tended to follow the lead of authors in effacing the communal sanctions that restrict the use of sacred oral stories in traditional tribal communities. (456)

Even Thomas King acknowledges such problems concerning the classification of Native literature and seems compelled to admit that "[perhaps] our simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by Natives will suffice for the while providing we resist the temptations of trying to define a Native" (1990, *xii*). He concludes that Native stories in a written form open up new worlds of "imagiNative" possibilities that are concerned with two types of relationships: <1> the relationship of Native people to

community, and <2> the relationship between oral literature and written literature. It is this latter relationship with which I am concerned.

Thus, Erdrich's and Maracle's novels can be read in the context of this struggle of cultural exchange, where a traditional oral world and a literary world compete for and sometime cooperate in the same space. Tracks presents narrative as the very site of contention, creating an unresolvable ambiguity of cultural worlds of Native shamanism and European Catholicism. Two narrators struggle to control a story that initially appears to be a strictly polarized situation. And Ravensong represents features of an oral tradition through acts of narrative exclusion. While figures of West Coast Native tradition are presented, most notably the Trickster Raven, narrative scenes in which storytelling events are dramatically represented but which a reader is not allowed to hear. The result is an ironic displacement of the reader who must recreate the missing element of a storytelling event, the content of the story itself.

Both of these novels create a narrative display of unresolved tension between different cultural worlds. By writing them, Erdrich and Maracle have placed themselves within the transmission tradition of a print culture — what Foucault calls *authorial discourse*, and Emberley, *written ideological containment*. Consequently, I have placed Tracks and Ravensong within the critical discourse concerning *oral literature* and *Native literature* , all the while being aware of the challenges they present to such terms. This may create a space that, figuratively at least, is neither oral or written. Or, as Homi Bhabha has stated in his chapter "DissemiNation", from The Location of Culture:

> We must always keep open a supplementary space for the articulation of cultural knowledges that are adjacent and adjunct but not necessarily accumulative, teleological or dialectical. (163)

Chapter Two:

Spoken Words / Written Spaces

> [T]he appearance of intratextual stories that interrupt the historical narrative, and the larger historical narrative written in the vernacular combine to contest the boundaries between such oppositions as oral and written, truth and non-truth, history and fiction.
>
> (Emberley, Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory, 131)

Spoken Words / Written Spaces

If Tracks and Ravensong are novels in which traditional oral material might be read as interrupting or infiltrating the fictional narratives of particular Native communities, then to look at the ways in which orality is signified, denoted, and then utilized in them assumes that once oral material is written down it may still retain the basic characteristics, or at least discernible traces, that define it as such. Then I must ask in regards to any printed oral material: is it possible to distinguish between a text's oral features that are determined by its social transmission and what are its *purely* literary characteristics[1]? In his introduction to All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction (1990), Thomas King briefly surveys how Native writers have represented elements of oral tradition in writing. The strategies they have used are many and varied. He cites the example of Harry Robinson who uses textual elements of rhythm, pattern, syntax, and sound to signify the performative elements of storytelling, such as gesture, intonation, variation and even music. Others, such as Jeanette Armstrong or Tomson Highway, use figurative elements of cultural themes and motifs, such as the Trickster figure, to create a juxtaposition of indigenous cultural themes and Judeo-Christian images.

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[1] In his essay "Orality versus Literacy in Mazisi Kunene's" (1992), Wole Ogundele deals with this same issue. He asks whether an oral rhetorical tradition can pass through the process of literary inscription and remain unchanged. Conversely, "Can literature that is written perform the same functions, and in the same manner, as oral literature?"(9) He argues that in 'Emperor Shaka the Great', the mixing of past and present narratives reveals that Kunene has created a nationalistic myth. This poem, while it has been shaped the though and imagination of an oral tradition has been mediated through writing. Reminiscent of Walter Ong, Ogundele argues that there is a cultural schizophrenia between an orality that is totalizing in its thought processes and writing that differentiates and decontextualises.(9-10, 22)

But Tracks and Ravensong are part of a much larger discourse of literary practices that spans journalism to anthropology. Sequoya, in her article "How (!) is an Indian? A Contest of Stories" (1993) identifies this rather large arena of literary practice as problematic, or at least paradoxical, in the demands it places on the establishment of Native identity.

> For all that Western narrative practices of displacement and distance have been internalized as convention and celebrated as style, they are nevertheless practices that deprecate contestatory points of view. They are not only the editorial practices of journalists, nor only the appropriative practices of anthropologists, but, more problematically, literary practices in defense of a corner on the market for local color and pedagogical practices converting knowledge of "others" to institutional power. (458)

An examination of two anthropological texts, Life Lived Like A Story (1990) and The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems From the Swampy Cree Indians (1976), may perhaps provide some insight into this problem of appropriation by narrative displacement. They represent significant and conscious efforts to transcribe and accurately represent oral traditional materials, but not necessarily the social and cultural practices of transmission that contain such materials.

These two examples fall within a wider context that includes the linguistic endeavors of Edward Sapir and the anthropological work of Franz Boas, Marius Barbeau, William Beynon, and more recently Dennis Tedlock, and Dell Hymes.[2] The collections of stories

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[2] Another notable example of critical discourse on the interactions of oral and literary traditions is perhaps Albert Lord's and Milman Parry's work with Serbocroation heroic songs culminating in Lord's The Singer of the Tales (1960). It is an attempt to use documentation of heroic songs and epic narrative to demonstrate the idea that the Homeric verse of the Iliad and Ulysses were oral texts before finally being written down..

The issue of cross cultural textual interactions has been hotly contested in the context of

produced by Boas (Tsimshin Mythology, 1916), Sapir (Takelma Texts 1909, Nootka Texts 1939), Barbeau and Beynon (Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I, 1987 {collected 1915-1957}) represent significant examples of how oral material was documented at the turn of the century. In such examples a variety of narratives, or narrative versions of the same tales are provided but little is documented as to the typical social activities in which such stories might normally be told. More recently, Dennis Tedlock (Traditional Literatures of the American Indian: Texts and Interpretations, 1981) and Dell Hymes ("Discovering Oral Performance and Measured Verse in American Indian Narrative", 1977 and In Vain I Tried To Tell You: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics, 1981) have examined the problems involved in the literary representation of the rhetorical styles employed in oral storytelling.

As examples of textual interaction between indigenous oral and literate European cultures, the material presented by Norman and Cruikshank can be categorized as anthropological anthologies. But they do represent significant departures from earlier anthropological endeavors. Life Lived Like A Story presents the results of a unique collaboration between Julie Cruikshank, Annie Ned and Angela Sidney. Angela Sydney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned wanted their life stories written down.

> These narrators want to produce booklets that their grandchildren can read. Their own childhood instruction came either from observation of from oral tradition, but they recognize that children now learn from books. (16)

African literature. Judith Gleason's A Recitation of Ifa, Oracle of the Yoruba (1973) represents a anthropological effort similar to that of Cruikshank and Norman. She is one of many western scholars who stand in the middle of what has become a controversial issue of Western appropriation versus African reclamation of indigenous tradition and the development of an indigenous literary tradition. See footnote 1, Chapter One regarding Rand Bishop.

Cruikshank is very clear the state that "each life story is presented in a way that clearly acknowledges the oral copyright of the narrator" (xi). The Wishing Bone Cycle presents a model of documentation similar to the work of Tedlock and Hymes. It represents an attempt to typographically represent the rhetorical practices that are involved in storytelling of specific oral tradition of the Swampy Cree. And in doing so, Norman tries to account for aspects of the social practices that are involved in the storytelling. In both of these examples the act of writing stories down is not necessarily problematic. Rather, I am asking: what does such writing actually represent?

In both of these examples one cannot discount the conventions of writing that bind books. Life Lived Like A Story and The Wishing Bone Cycle are collections of traditional oral material that utilize specific textual strategies of representation which, however honest and collaborative, have a specific agenda that is foreign to that material. As such, they are not neutral representations, but take and re-contextualize material of various sources according to an anthropological editorial agenda that may be external to that material's cultural context or function. But, if Life Lived Like A Story and The Wishing Bone Cycle represent a cultural exchange between oral and literary traditions, then they might show how a written text changes when material from oral tradition is incorporated and demonstrate that an oral tradition does not remain unaffected through interaction with literary tradition. In such an interaction, oral and literary culture both place demands on one another and highlight the problem of transcribing oral texts into written form. What appears to have happened in these two examples is a narrative or textual displacement of the story texts from their actual living context.

Julie Cruikshank's collaborative effort with aboriginal elders Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned, Life Lived Like A Story (1990), is a recent example of a literary text written to represent an oral text. It is an example of how a culturally defined notion of

story that is tied to an oral tradition presents challenges to a to a strictly literary perception of narrative. On one hand, merely writing down these stories places them into a medium in which they were not conceived. Julie Cruikshank is fully aware an anthropologist's problematic relationship to texts collected in a participant observation context that may "smooth out contradictions in an effort to present a comprehensive picture … [and] … explain away the subjective reality of the speaker" (4). " To interpret an orally narrated life story, we need enough sense of the speaker's cultural background to provide context for hearing what is said. One obstacle hampering the analysis of autobiography is the very real human tendency to make implicit comparisons between the account heard or read and one's own life" (4). On the other, Cruikshank's struggle with her own anthropological position allows for the representation of oral texts that challenge the boundaries of literacy in two ways. First, they contest a strictly literary conception of autobiographical prose narrative. While each of these storytellers presents a personal history, they also provide the type of cultural epic history that one might expect to find in *Beowulf* or *The Iliad* :

> These women talk about their lives using an oral tradition grounded in local idiom and a shared body of knowledge. A strict notion of biography might treat seemingly archaic mythological tales, place names, and songs as extraneous and omit them from the account. (2)

Second, it is clear that these stories being told are part of a collaboration that is characterized by dynamic oral and writing practices. Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned are each allowed to present their personal / cultural autobiographies, while Julie Cruikshank tells / writes a story about these stories. This results in narratives that contrast the solitary mediation of a story that characterizes the writing and reading of a written autobiography.

> Their accounts, then, included not only personal reminiscences of the kind we normally associate with autobiography, but detailed narratives elaborating

> mythological themes. Also embedded in their chronicles were songs, sometimes *moving listeners to tears* and other times to laughter. (***emphasis mine*** , 2)

These accounts represent a part of a social dynamic in which an audience is clearly effected by a storyteller's material and manner of delivery. Then Life Lived Like A Story combines both anthropological and autobiographical concerns with an awareness of contradictions and challenges involved in writing this material down. It is a consciously collaborative effort that presents four distinct and independent stories.

Even though Angela Sidney's, Kitty Smith's, and Annie Ned's stories are written, as storytellers they can be seen to act as interpreters and critics of the very material they present. A storyteller in an oral tradition is both a mediator and interpreter, maintaining a dialectical relationship with the text being presented. According to Dennis Tedlock's, "The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation in American Indian Religion" (1981), this is an inherent feature of oral culture: storytellers both respect the text and revise it to meet the conditions of their immediate context (49). So, in the context of Life Lived Like A Story, when Angela Sidney and Kitty Smith both tell a version of "The Stolen Woman", each respective presentation acts as corroboration and validation of the others. Yet, within a printed text these story versions also present differing points of view which are directly connected to the personal life stories which accompany them.

> Even when different narrators tell the "same" story, each gives her own distinctive version. Each teller emphasizes the difficult choices faced by a protagonist similar to those she, or someone in her family, has had to make at marriage, after a death, or in a crisis. A narrator is also likely to expand on skills she shares with the protagonist, both tangible, practical abilities and less tangible knowledge about women's power. The way the story makes its "point" or gains its meaning depends on the particular situation it is used to clarify. (341)

Angela Sidney's narrative places two *Stolen Women* (102 & 117) stories within the context of her "Becoming a Woman" (98), her marriage and having children. Kitty Smith's *Stolen Women* (241) story occurs within the narrative section titled "The Resourceful Woman" which helps to explain her own position of economic independence and friendships with women in the context of two marriages.

In contrast to Life Lived Like A Story, Howard Norman's The Wishing Bone Cycle (1976) is a literary attempt to present those structural elements that would characterize the speaking of an oral text. Fluctuations in intonation, volume and dialect, features that are a normal part of any oral text, are not easily signified in writing but are part of what Howard Norman attempts to inscribe in print. Dennis Tedlock asserts that there is a way of fixing *words* without making visible *marks*. This is done through a *simplification* of ordinary talk, not just in the sense of words as strings of consonants and vowels, but its patterns of stress, emphasis through pitch, tone, pauses or stops that can move somewhat independently of the mere words. Such variations can make a word mean quite different things. According to Tedlock, to *fix a text* without making *visible marks* is to bring *stress* and *pitch* and *pause* into a fixed relationship with the *words* (Tedlock 45).

Paradoxically, Norman attempts to keep the oral texts he is documenting *unfixed* by employing clearly defined typographical codes. Each narrative cycle in The Wishing Bone Cycle is prefaced by a general description of details and information which are usually difficult to inscribe in a written text. He defines the typography he employs to indicate the performative aspects involved in the telling of the story that he heard: variations in pitch, volume, repetition and significance of important names. For example, the teller of "Wichikäpache Goes Walking, Walking: A Tale" has a specific style of telling, which Norman makes explicit through the textual strategy of a specific typographical code.

> In keeping with Nibèbegebesábe's style of telling, words spoken loudly are here represented by capital letters, and those spoken softly by italics. Traditionally, Wichikäpache's name is often spoken loudly in tales, twice in a row, reaffirming the fact that a sacred story is in progress. (133).

Periods of silences and general pauses in speech are indicated by line breaks and longer silences by three spaced periods. And so three qualitative measures of volume encoded in the written text appear as follows:

> WICHIKÅPACHE
> Wichikapache said, "I didn't have any dance!"
> He said
> *he was hungry*
> *and angry* .
> But
> there was no one left to listen to him. (146)

Encountering these specific presentational structures, a reader's attention might be drawn to certain poetic appearances of the printed text. What might appear to be narrative poetry, because of its stanza like arrangement, is actually a structure used to denote specific speaking patterns that this particular storyteller, Nibèbegebesábe, employs. Its printed appearance might conform to some criteria of poetic narrative but it has more in common with a script for a play or a religious ritual.

The Wishing Bone Cycle also might be viewed as a critical attempt to resist a parasitic commodification of oral texts. It presents a structural model of how printed texts might present the performative social dynamic that characterizes oral storytelling events. Norman

has taken special pains to place narratives within a clearly defined social context. For example, the story of how a trickster deceives some ducks, "Wichikäpache Goes Walking, Walking: A Tale", is part of a translation of a performance by a specific individual - Nibèbegebesábe. It was witnessed by ten people who were all Cree, except for Howard Norman himself, and occurred at a specific time near Kiskito Lake, Manitoba. And the reader is told that this specific narrative is an *atayohkäwin* , a sacred story "concerned with a time when primarily totem ancestors and the Cree creator-trickster figure, Wichikäpache, roamed the earth" (133). But the presentation of this material in the introduction — the telling about a story — might be perceived in juxtaposition to the telling of a story: it is merely the presentation of an analysis of a storytelling event. And while the story told by Nibèbegebesábe has the structural appearance of a performed narrative, it is merely a printed portrayal of a storytelling event. "In the end, the text remains the text still waiting to be brought to light; the analysis remains the analysis, bearing no resemblance to the text and learning nothing *from* the text, and the analyst even takes professional pride in that fact" (Tedlock 49).

Both of these examples, Life Lived Like A Story and The Wishing Bone Cycle, demonstrate how anthropological anthologies of traditional oral material can have a broader view of text, one that leaves room for representation of performance and ritual. But what is being represented in these examples are the structural features that distinguish an oral text, but not necessarily the dynamic social elements that would show them to be oral events. And this is perhaps the trap into which both Cruikshank and Norman fall. But, I argue, the fact that both are aware of this demonstrates the coercion that literary expectations may demands of such anthropological endeavors. Both Cruikshank and Norman play subjective roles in the literary documentation of oral texts. In a written form, not only are the teller's (informer's) and listeners' perspectives represented, but that of the *objective* recorder is

inscribed as well. James Clifford's "On Ethnographic Authority" (1983) documents the varying strategies that ethnographers have employed to overcome problems presented by the questioning of a writer's authoritative act of *representation* (141). The very nature of an oral tradition is that texts are tied to specific speakers. *Utterance* and those things tied to it - authorial intention (or more appropriately, narrative intention), audience, time, location, intonation - are all part of the story text. It is a myth that oral texts are anonymous, perhaps constructed out of the need of a literary society to appropriate texts from First Nations peoples so often regarded as inarticulate because theirs is not a literary culture. Ultimately Clifford concludes that a coherent written textual presentation presupposes choosing a narrative strategy that necessarily represents a controlling mode of authority (142).

So, in Life Lived Like A Story and The Wishing Bone Cycle, Cruikshank and Norman maintain their voices in an academic context which editorially contextualizes the main body of oral material they endeavor to present. Both of these examples establish a separation of the teller from the tale by locating contextualizing notes and appendices at a spatial distance from the texts of the stories. And so the transformation of an orally performed text into a literary one begins with the isolation of the oral texts from the social dynamic that would normally contain them. Thus the text of story itself is reduced to a structural feature of an oral text. As, James Clifford states: "For discourse to become text it must become *autonomous* . . . separated from specific utterance and authorial intention. . . . It does not depend on being in the presence of a speaker" (132). In his essay "Hermes' Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description" (1986), Vincent Crapanzano makes a similar argument on a grammatical basis, identifying a substitution of the use of first-and-second person plural for third-person pronouns in ethnological documentation.

> The first and second are properly indexical: they "relate" to the context of utterance. The third person pronouns refer back anaphorically to an antecedent, a noun, often

> enough a proper noun, in the text. They [the speakers] are liberated so to speak, from the context of utterance, but they are embedded in the textual context. (71)

And this is what Cruikshank and Norman have inadvertently done. To some extent, both have distanced the story texts from their speakers, creating a type of authorial, or narrative displacement.

While the anthropological motivations of Cruikshank cannot be confused with the voices of Annie Ned, Kitty Smith or Angela Sidney, Life Lived Like A Story creates an authorial displacement in so far as what is textually represented are their stories. To her credit, Cruikshank is aware of the tension of expectations resulting from competing epistemological systems of anthropology and the oral traditions she is documenting. In her introduction to Life Lived Like A Story Cruikshank identifies genre characteristics of the cultures of these women, song, mythology and so on, for which the literary convention of "good biography" leaves little room (3).

> If a distinguishing feature of these life histories is their inclusion of well-known stories, we have to ask whether they may actually reflect as much about the dynamics of narration as about the workings of society. (2)

As much as Life Lived Like A Story tells us about the societies of Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, or Annie Ned, it also shows how such accounts are processed through the narrative strategies of an anthropological literary tradition. Without the contextualizing preface to each of these storytellers there is little in their texts that would differentiate them from a pastiche of narrative conventions of literary fairytale, narrative ballad, history or short stories. If there is little room for genre forms of an oral tradition within a *good biography* then there is also perhaps little room for the representation of the storytelling event that would normally contain these texts — the narrative dynamics of what is a socially defined event. And Cruikshank is aware of this, that the literary conventions that bind

anthropology and ethnology also define the conventions of representation that she employs:

> In anthropology it is customary to provide context in an ethnographic overview. This convention has obvious shortcomings. It offers very little sense of the cultural experience because it smooths out contradictions in an effort to present a comprehensive picture. There is also the risk that an outsider's synopsis may seem to explain away the subjective reality of the speaker. (4)

So, what happens to the speakers in Life Lived Like A Story? The reader knows that Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned have told these stories, but the reader does not get to hear them *speak* their texts. What is *not* represented is the story act: the telling of a story and the social dynamics surrounding it. Just as writers require readers, storytellers require listeners: "[s]torytelling does not occur in a vacuum. Storytellers need an audience, a response, in order to make the telling a worthwhile experience"(Cruikshank 16). But for a reader to make the reading experience worthwhile a close ethnographic and geographic comparison of these texts is necessary to distinguish their tellers. When Annie Ned tells her stories —

> I'm going to put it down who we are. This is our *Shagóon* — our history. Lots of people in those days, they told their story all the time. This story comes from the old people, not just from one person— from my grandpa, Hutshi Chief; from Laberge Chief; from Dalton Post Chief. (278) —

there is little to distinguish them from what Kitty Smith says —

> First I'll tell you our Shagóon, our family history. This is for our family to know. The way you should tell you history is this way: first, my own history — that's the same as my mother's in Indian way — then my dad's, then my husband's. I'll start with Deisheetaan history. That's my own people. (37) —

except for the fact that each of their narratives is spatially located with the specific text (an introduction) provided by Cruikshank to identify it. Whatever vocal presence these women possess is mediated through the preface to each section that supplies cultural and linguistic information as well as information as to how each of the storytellers perceives her stories. What was once a series of storytelling events has been transformed into a reading event.

Similarly, Norman makes a clear distinction between the voice of the storytellers and the typological representation of the actual story.

> [Storytelling] performances are traditionally audience-participation events; sometimes, for instance, children sat in totally rapt attention, while at other times an ongoing dialogue between narrator and audience prevailed, making the performance a collaborative telling. (Norman 21)

In The Wishing Bone Cycle Norman attempts to accurately portray such a social process and represent individuality of the storyteller. But ultimately the social process of an oral tradition is still isolated from its texts. In a short preface to the story of Wichikäpache, Norman creates a specific context of utterance by giving credit directly to Nibèbegebesábe. But he creates an author / narrator displacement through the textual strategies he employs. Contextual statements such as "'With all Wichikäpache 's walking, I get tired,' Nibèbegebesábe stated after the tale..." are not included within the tale's text, but instead in this preface (134). Such a statement would locate him directly in the story he tells. Rather, this contextualizing note to the story "Wichikäpache Goes Walking, Walking: A Tale" has been displaced to the preface. Nibèbegebesábe's place in the story as the narrator is displaced insofar as that text does not directly show him to be telling it. Here, Norman tells the story of how Nibèbegebesábe tells his story, and both are reduced to the status of a written object. It is not just that the story Norman presents is liberated from the teller, but

the teller is also isolated from his text. The resulting text appears as a monologue in which Norman talks about Nibèbegebesábe and his stories.

Ironically, Norman has provided another example of author / narrator displacement. His later anthology, Where the Chill Came From (1982), provides a general contextualization of Cree culture and storytelling as pertaining to a cannibal figure commonly known as Windigo. Although each story has little immediate contextual information, the general introduction provides a context of dialogue and anthropological information. Here he demonstrates an awareness of the nature of oral material when he provides a transcript of a Windigo story told by Michael Autao. In this example, the full social and physical context is described and the interjections from the listeners and dialogue between teller and listeners are included. This might be the script of a play. I am able to read this Windigo story as more than an example of the horror genre of literature. But if this example provides a model by which to frame the rest of the stories in this anthology, then he has not given them this same textual consideration. Perhaps both of these anthologies, Where the Chill Came From (1982) and The Wishing Bone Cycle (1976), would have benefited from more of this type of textual treatment.

In contrast to Life Lived Like a Story or The Wishing Bone Cycle, which present story texts, Tracks and Ravensong dramatically represent storytelling events. These novels fictionally present oral traditional material in the context of social events. Consequently, the narrative strategies that Erdrich and Maracle have employed are distinct from such anthropological documents. But how do Erdrich's and Maracle's narrative strategies represent and portray such textual interactions in a literary mode, the novel, which might also subsume such distinctive characteristics in a manner similar to Cruikshank's and Norman's works? In Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory (1993), Julia Emberley argues that the framing of

storytelling in novels such as these two is a nostalgic act that distinguishes them from being mere collections of stories.

> It is important to recognize that traditional Native oral storytelling is a category that already differs itself in its recent reception in the forms of transcriptions, tapings, translations, and publications. (130-1)

In his essay "Discourse in the Novel"(The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, 1981) Bakhtin voices a similar concern about how literary expectations produce monologues. In regards to genre and the operational context of language:

> this category [the novel] attempts to regulate the area of literary and everyday (in the sense of dialectological) language not already regulated by the strict, previously coalesced genres, with the specific and well-differentiated demands they make on their own languages.
>
> "General literariness" attempts to introduce order into this heteroglossia, to make a single, particular style canonical for it. (381-2)

Erdrich's and Maracle's novels occur within written ideological containment of this *general literariness*, that constitutes a representational authority. "In a word, the novelistic plot serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds" (365). So the problem of oral / literary interaction presented by Tracks and Ravensong is different from those problems presented by the examples of Life Lived Like a Story and The Wishing Bone Cycle. In regards to these novels, I am examining the fictional representation of active oral cultures. In them there is a sense of textual play that confuses a bifurcated perception of an oral world versus a literary world. This is what distinguishes these novels from material presented by Cruikshank and Norman: the latter examples present material that might be termed oral literature (oral material textualized in print form), the former contain fictional

representations of an oral tradition as a social process. The fictional representation of oral traditions in Tracks and Ravensong may present the possibility to undermine a textual autonomy which subsumes the interactions between a teller and listener, performative aspects of an oral tradition which are often considered *extra-textual.* But, while the storytelling events portrayed in Tracks and Ravensong are might be less anonymous than the stories in Life Lived Like a Story and The Wishing Bone Cycle, the question of who speaks in them is complicated by a multilayered subjectivity of fiction. These novels create a play of voices that qualifies as dialogism. Or as Michael Holquist has summarized: "A word, discourse, language or culture undergoes 'dialogization' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute" (427). In both of these novels the voices being presented make separate claims and the narrative ambiguity resulting from this remains unresolved. Thus, Erdrich's and Maracle's novels present different possibilities of what can be meant by the term *Native Literature* and *oral literature*..

Louise Erdrich's Tracks seems to signify orality through a juxtaposition of narratives: two people tell the same story from opposing perspectives. Both of these competing narratives begin with the drowning of Fleur Pillager. But while the narrative of Nanapush is clearly meant to be oral in nature (a family history being told to Fleur's daughter), Pauline's narrative seems addressed to the general reader. Tracks has some similarities to Cruikshank's text in that different cultural narratives can be read to interact with and infiltrate each other. In Tracks this narrative juxtaposition and the resulting cultural interaction demonstrate the tensions between two epistemological worlds, one oral, the other literate, residing simultaneously in a reservation bureaucracy and Christian Catholic epistemology. Superficially the character / narrator Nanapush can be read to control the development of the story through narrative infiltrations, or penetrations, of Pauline's

narration. But such a reading is compromised by contradictions in Nanapush's narration and ideological position towards literacy and the Church. As well, Pauline's own narrative position is not as powerless as it might initially appear. This subject will be dealt with further in "Chapter Three: Narrative Penetrations".

Similar to Life Lived Like a Story, Ravensong presents a constant intermixing of personal history and more formal stories that some might classify as myth. While the mythic characters of Cedar and Raven remain undeveloped and mostly figurative, the interaction between the narrative of Cedar and Raven with Stacey's personal story indicates the underlying presence of a social, cultural and ritual context in which storytelling has the status of a dynamic event. And this interweaving of a mythic world, represented through mythic characters of Raven and Cedar, with a realistic world where epidemic, disease and tragedy seem to rule might evoke a sense of Magic Realism.[3] But such as condition also presents a condition of heteroglossia in which

> [at] any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions, - social, historical, meteorological, physiological - that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions ...". (Holquist 428)

What distinguishes Ravensong from Life Lived Like a Story, The Wishing Bone Cycle or Tracks are instances in which there is a lack of narrative disclosure. Utterances are seen to be made but are not heard. Ravensong presents scenes in which storytelling events occur, and while the reader is able to observe the participants and their context and understand that a story is being told, the text of that story remains largely undisclosed. Ravensong

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[3] This point will be address in more detail in "Chapter Five: Rereading Native Literature".

presents storytelling without the story texts. The narrative silences that result from this are examined in "Chapter Four: Ensuing Silences".

For Erdrich and Maracle, writing appears to have become a space of cultural re-appropriation, a space where Native peoples can literally create their own image. In Tracks and Ravensong it is difficult to view oral traditional material in a space that was formerly seen as *frontier*, *wild*, or *out there* or as a mode of narrative discourse that presents no ambiguities of meaning or identity. In adapting literary forms which have formerly been foreign to their cultures, they, and those storytellers who work with writers (for example: Angela Sidney, Annie Ned and Kitty Smith, and Nibèbegebesábe), challenge inscribed concepts of oral literature and Native literature. At the very least, this requires a sensitivity to the cultural elements that are part of an ongoing discourse surrounding Native literature. As Jeanette Armstrong has recommended in her anthology Looking At The Words Of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature (1993):

> I suggest that in reading First Nations Literature the questioning must first be an acknowledgment and recognition that the voices are culture-specific voices and that there are experts within those cultures who are essential to be drawn from and drawn out in order to incorporate into the reinterpretation through pedagogy, the context of English Literature coming from Native Americans. (7)

But to consider these examples as more than ethnic folklore or marginalized ethnic literature requires an acknowledgment that oral traditions are socially and culturally active and legitimate, whether or not they are presented as spoken or written documents.

But the representations of Native American oral traditions in anthropology and contemporary creative writing are not merely interesting narratives isolated from political or cultural tensions. Such writing is part of the issue of literature appropriation (what some

might call literary colonialism) that Native North American artists and academics alike have addressed. Native literature represents, as Jana Sequoya has argued, a struggle of narrative and interpretive voices competing with each other to control, contain and redefine cultural difference and Native identity. This represents a paradoxical situation where in order "to be perceived as speaking subjects American Indians must adopt categories of meaning and codes of representation that convey an implicit set of social goals in many ways contrary to those that articulate their own stories" (453).

Like the social process of indigenous oral traditions, Native literature may function as an inscribed repository of creation and memory requiring a reader to be an interactive interpreter and critic in multiple cultural locations. Within this context Native literature occupies a contested site of cross-cultural exchange between indigenous oral traditions and a North American literary tradition. Thus Life Lived Like a Story, The Wishing Bone Cycle, Tracks and Ravensong can be seen as material and figurative attempts to articulate cultural difference and Native identity. They are part of a larger panorama of cultural tension that visual artist Gerald McMaster discusses in relation to the public reaction to his 1991 exhibition "How the West was Lost" at the McMichael Canadian Gallery in Kleinburg, Ontario. He argues that at one time the aesthetic meaning of the cliché *go west young man* indicated a west that meant acculturation and assimilation in respect to indigenous culture. But McMaster also claims that now a Native artist need not choose between contemporary or traditional indigenous expression:

> This newly recognized duality allowed the artist a sense of transcendency. The two sides could co-exist and even allow other meanings in their art. ... they knew the choice one made would always be respected in the Native community, as long as they respected the culture. (15)

Chapter Three:

Narrative Penetrations

Before I knew it, the first cup was gone, and then the second, and then I just kept drinking and listening. At some point Nanapush took over talking. It was still light out, the dusk about two hours hence. I had become good at calculating winter afternoons. I was gaining fortitude for summer, when the sun set late.

"My story is this," said Nanapush. "There was once a little rain. It fell on a girl's head a drop at a time."

(Erdrich, Tracks 148)

Narrative Penetrations

> All three of Erdrich's novels, to one degree or another, rely on a technique of accumulated knowledge, of splicing together different dramatic voices in different times in a series of interrelated stories about the lives, spiritual triumphs and physical tragedies of her mythological North Dakota families. (Passaro, 162)

However, in Tracks this splicing of voices exhibits itself as dual narratives. Instead of a larger community of voices that characterizes Love Medicine or The Beet Queen we now have just two voices: Tracks appears to be a storytelling contest between two narrators as to who is telling the true story. Two people, Nanapush and Pauline tell their stories beginning with the drowning of Fleur Pillager and demonstrate opposing perspectives and ideological roles. Nanapush is an oral storyteller who uses his narratives to shape his reality around him. By contrast, Pauline appears to be an impotent narrator, a voyeur who is left staring from the margins of her own narration. This bifurcated narrative structure creates a narrative competition which, superficially at least, appears to provide *clarity and unity*.[1] But such a reading of Tracks as an unambiguous juxtaposition of narratives is not consistent. A reader is forced to break down such an bifurcated reading because of inconsistencies in the character of these narrators and attempts by them to penetrate each other's narratives. But where are these inconsistencies in character and narrative penetration located? I argue that such narrative penetration in Tracks can be read on two levels. First, there is the *representation* of an oral tradition when the character Nanapush

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[1] Erdrich's use of multiple narrative voices may be one reason why critics suggest that her writing lacks a clear and unifying narrative form. This duality of narrative voices may be in response to critics who, according to Vince Passaro "Tales of a Literary Marriage"(1991), view Love Medicine as confusing and lacking a central and unifying narrative form (Passaro, 162).

enacts a storytelling event. Second, Nanapush's and Pauline's narratives do not remain separate from each other but, in at least one significant instance one narrative can be read to penetrate the other; When Nanapush tells a *Trickster story* to Pauline, tricking her into giving up her penance of restricted urination he acts outside his own narrative frame (I shall refer to this *Trickster story* as the *Rain Story* here after).

This indicates that there is a representation of aspects of an oral tradition in Tracks with which many readers are not familiar. Such a representation creates a narrative paradox because oral storytelling becomes part of a literary text. "One of the key aspects of the Oral Tradition is that words are substantiated through the act of being spoken or stated" (Young-Ing, 179). But in Tracks this *oral tradition* is signified within the conventions of literary fiction.. When storytelling becomes an action within the narrative, the narration is advanced, and orality becomes a feature of stylistic form and narrative action. Louise Erdrich's Tracks might be read to represent this element of an oral tradition through a contest of narratives.[2] The narrative struggle in Tracks is then a literary space in which speaking voices, Nanapush's and Pauline's, struggle to shape and control the story being presented.

If Tracks is read as a strictly bifurcated arrangement of narratives then it is possible to talk about the narrators as storytellers whose mutual interactions occur merely as characters within

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[2] I also wonder whether the dual narrative voices in Tracks is a direct outgrowth of type of Erdrich's and Dorris' collaboration. In his interview "Tales From a Literary Marriage" (1994), Vince Passaro focuses directly on the literary - personal relationship of Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich and comments on their development as collaborative writers who share their work with each other. He postulates that "the act of collaboration serves a vital, extra-literary function, perhaps as a fortification against an insinuating and inevitable competition" (Passaro, 166). This complicates any discussion of what Foucault has identified as an author discourse that "performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse assuring a classificatory function" (Foucault, 107). Foucault voices this concern about a text's relationship to its author versus a text's form or structure versus the point at which we begin "to recount the lives of authors rather than heroes" (Foucault, 1984, 101). However, in the context of this thesis to focus on Erdrich's and Dorris' personal / creative collaboration as a metaphorical analogy of Tracks' sexually and racially impregnated narrative is to de-emphasize the significance about how such bifurcated narrative structure can be read to operate. This subject merits further consideration than I am able to provide here.

their own stories, but not at the level of narration. Their narratives would then be characterized as homodiegetic narratives.[3] In other words, the narrative contest between them would have to be read as interactions with one another that occur on the level of character interrelations within their narratives themselves, but that the chapters alternately narrated by Nanapush and Pauline do not interact with each other. Accordingly, if Tracks is mapped out and its chapters grouped according to identifiable narrators, the resulting juxtaposition appears regular and ordered. Every chapter presents a shift in narrative voice, beginning with the first chapter narrated by Nanapush, the second by Pauline, the third by Nanapush again, and so on. And this narrative juxtaposition is distinguished further by the different audiences that these two storytellers address. The narrative of Nanapush is clearly meant to be oral in nature — a grandfather is telling a family history to a granddaughter, reinforcing a continuity to a past and an oral tradition. As a reader, I am merely a voyeur viewing this as a literary event. Pauline's narrative is addressed to no one in particular and appears unreliable due to her own reluctance to become an active character within her own narrative. While Nanapush's narrative places the reader in a position of voyeurism, Pauline assumes that position herself. Then, with respect to Pauline's story I am a voyeur viewing a voyeur.

Nanapush substantiates his authority to tell his story by making an explicit reference to a world established outside of and prior to a literary tradition (at least prior to the fictional reality that is introduced in Tracks). "Before the boundaries were set, before the sickness scattered the clans like gambling sticks, an old man never had to live alone and cook for himself, never had to braid his own hair, or listen to his silence" (32). He locates himself within the story he tells — "I saw ...", "I guided ...", "I saved the last Pillager. The one you will not call mother ..."(2) and the one whose drowning has precipitated the telling of

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[3] *homodiegetic narrative* This is a narrative in which the narrator is a character in the situations and events being recounted (Prince, 41).

his story. It is as if he is tracing the marks, the *tracks* of the past. In Tracks written documents appear to be viewed like so much "chicken scratch that can be scattered by the wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match" (225) or *tracks* to be treated with suspicion: "[Margaret] didn't want the tracks rubbing off on her skin. She never learned to read, and the mystery troubled her" (47). But Nanapush uses his narrative power to orally walk his audience over the footsteps of his past. He is staking his claim to speak by establishing a personal history in continuity with this ordered world where everything had its own place, without boundaries.

In each chapter narrated by Nanapush, the reader is made aware of an audience being spoken to — I am looking into a world that is not mine. "Granddaughter, you are the child of the invisible, the one who disappeared when, along with the first bitter punishment of early winter, a new sickness swept down" (1-2). He admonishes his granddaughter to pay attention — "This is where you come in, my girl, so listen." (57) — and apologizes for his own deficiency in memory — "... and I now ask your indulgence for I can only repeat what I remember, even to a granddaughter ..." (105). I am eavesdropping on a discussion between an old man and his adopted granddaughter. And although I never hear her speak, I can listen to Nanapush's answers to her questions, answers that establish an intertextual oral references just as one might make an intertextual literary reference within the frame of an essay, novel, or poem: "And now you ask how you got to be a Nanapush. You wonder how a man with no wife got his name extended" (60); "An old man had some relatives, got a chance to pass his name on, especially if the name was an important one like Nanapush" (32). And by extending this name to Lulu Nanapush he makes a connection between his name and that of the first Nanapush.

> My father said, "Nanapush. That's what you'll be called. Because it's got to do with trickery and living in the bush. Because it's got to do with something a girl

can't resist. The first Nanapush stole fire. You will steal hearts. (33)

Within this context, Nanapush's use of names is not merely a means to substantiate authority to tell a narrative. He himself personifies a cultural struggle between texts: those that are oral and those that are written. This storytelling is presented by a narrator who is the name-sake of a trickster who is not easily duped and who has some sense of the difference between oral and literary worlds. "*No Name* , I told Father Damien when he came to take the church census. *No Name* , I told the Agent when he made up the tribal roll. 'I have the use of a white man's name,' I told the Captain who delivered the ration payout for our first treaty, ' but I won't sign your paper with that name either'"(33). This statement echoes his words in the first chapter foreshadowing a struggle between a literary world of printed power and a world that is substantiated through speech.

> My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know. I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years growth. *I spoke aloud the words* of the government treaty, and refused to *sign the settlement papers* that would take away our woods and lake. (*italics mine,* 2)

Ironically, while I am reading a written document, Nanapush's narrative is presented as an oral document. And he is fearful of the distorting power of written documents.

Conversely, Pauline's narrative provides a foil for Nanapush's own storytelling. Pauline's narrative is easily distinguished from Nanapush's by the simple fact that her audience remains unidentified. Right from the beginning of her first narrative section within Tracks, Pauline claims that she is telling a story:

> And finally, when people were just about to get together and throw her [Fleur] out, she left on her own and didn't come back all summer. That's what I'm telling about. (12)

But, unlike Nanapush, she does not identify any specific person in the story as her audience.

To whom does she tell it? This question shadows Pauline's narrative throughout Tracks.

Pauline's narrative presence is problematic in that she appears to be racially and sexually distanced from the community in her story. In one instance Pauline tells of having been warned by her father against the anonymity imposed by an urban environment; that the anonymity of an urban centre, a white town, transforms one. "'You'll fade out there,'" he said, reminding me that I was lighter than my sisters, "'you won't be an Indian once you return'"(14). She becomes a character who would deny her culture as *pagan Native* for a sequestered existence in a convent, and is consequently marginalized by her own community. Later she experiences a vision from God telling her that she is not Indian at all. "He said that I was not whom I had supposed, I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137). Is this juvenile fantasy, fabrication or just plain denial? In strict contrast to Nanapush, such claims of identity make Pauline's narration seem unreliable. This denial of her connectedness to the Native community depicted in the novel may explain her lack of an audience.

Pauline presents herself as an invisible presence within her own story. If she perceives herself to be a racially marginalized figure in the Native community, then in Argus sexually she is not only undesirable; she is unnoticeable.[4]

> I was fifteen, alone, and so poor-looking I was invisible to most customers and to the men in the shop. Until they needed me, I blended into the stained brown walls, a skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes. (15-6)
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> . . . .
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> In truth, I hardly rinsed through the white girls' thoughts. (15)

[4] This could also be characterized as a wish to be a *heterodiegetic narrator* – a narrator who is not a character in the situations and events they are recounting (Prince, 40). But this is merely a structural distinction. To read the Tracks in this way de-emphasizes the elements involved in the social dynamics of storytelling. I will discuss this later.

And this invisibility is the source of her knowledge. What she tells seems to happen to others and she is removed from it.

> From this, I took what advantage I could find. Because I could fade into a corner or squeeze beneath a shelf I knew everything: how much cash there was in the till, what the men joked about when no one was around, and what they did to Fleur. (16)

Only later does Pauline discover that perhaps she had no choice in the matter, and subsequently no sexual desirability. "It wasn't long before I understood something that I didn't know then. The men would not have seen me not matter what I did, how I moved" (19-20). But in a vision of guilt in which she *is* noticed she is complicit in the death of the men who take cover in the meat locker freezer during a tornado.

> Their eyes followed me through dead air no matter how small I made myself. The old trick did not work this time. I was visible. They saw me, and it was clear from their eyes they knew my arms had fixed the beam in the cradle, back in Argus. I had sent them to this place. (162)

Where before she was the watcher, here she is the one being observed. Of course she is terrified and flees the admission implied by this vision.

Such narrative juxtaposition in Tracks is also distinguishable through the interaction of these narrators as characters and their mutual animosity towards each other. Within this novel each teller / narrator is given a certain written ideological role within the narrative discourse: Nanapush is a controlling and active storyteller while Pauline is a reluctant and almost invisible narrator. Nanapush is a trickster just like the Ojibwe trickster Nanabush / Nanabozho. This is a clear reference to a tradition of storytelling and cultural practices surrounding such a figure. Pauline exercises the voice of a penitent's and martyr's wish for beatification offered by Catholicism based on its own biblical literary tradition and

culture steeped in a history of physical deprivation, martyrdom and sainthood that she sees in Saint Cecelia, Saint Blaise, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Catherine (152). With these cultural references behind them a reader can hear Nanapush and Pauline battling it out on the pages to see who tells the true story.

Pauline's view of Nanapush is that of a meddler: he is "that old pagan Nanapush" — "As for him I had to bear such torment" (143). He is part of a penance that she must bear in her efforts to *prove Christ's ways*.

> ... Nanapush, the smooth-tongued artificer.
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> He had manufactured humiliations, traps. He was the servant of the lake, the arranger of secrets. Not one flare of belief lit his mind and he laughed too much, at everything, at me. (196)

But her opinion of Nanapush is contained within her general regard toward men in general, men who have ignored her, defined her as invisible because she is not sexually desirable but whose voices haunt her conscience.

> I left Argus because I couldn't get rid of the men. They walked nightlong through my dreams, looking for who to blame. Pauline! My name was a growl on their lips. A suspicion, a certainty, an iron hook on a rail. (62)

Nanapush regards Pauline, much as she regards herself — as someone who does not fit into the rest of the community, unnoticeable and homely, she is ignored. But he does not entirely disregard her.

> But she was different once her mouth opened and she started to wag her tongue. She was worse than a Nanapush, in fact. For while I was careful with my known facts, she was given to improving truth. ... Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage. (39)

But who is the one telling the odd tales and playing with the truth? When Nanapush tells a Trickster tale to Pauline, he is not merely telling a story from an oral culture, but, he is being deliberately creative and innovative in his manipulation.

At this point an oppositional analysis of the narrative voices in Tracks glosses over the ambiguities and contradictions that are actually present. A bifurcated reading begins to break down when I observe that both narrators present contradictory images of themselves. When thematic and cultural elements — Native oral traditional or Judeo-Christian — begin to find their way into examples of creative contemporary literature a type of narrative penetration occurs across cultures. In "Reading Between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich" (1990), Catherine Rainwater argues that the narrative structure in Erdrich's novels can be understood as a conflict of cultural codes — those of a Native American Shamanic tradition versus a Judeo-Christian biblical tradition.

> These religions are epistemologically, experientially, and teleologically different. Their simultaneous presence as cultural codes vexes the readers' effort to decide upon an unambiguous, epistemologically consistent interpretive framework. (407)

Nanapush exploits a conflict of codes on a narrative level by using what appears to be a traditional trickster tale, his *Rain Story*. While the traditional nature of his storytelling act would probably be obvious to an Ojibwe reader, conflation of cultural codes that surrounds the presentation of Nanapush's *Rain Story* are momentarily reduced when it is placed next to a similar trickster tale told by Charles Kawbawgam (Kawbawgam, 28-9)[5].

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[5] There are a number of ethnographic recordings of Ojibwe cultural oral material. While I will not dispute the political problems of cultural appropriation and representation concerning such texts, I have chosen one to create a juxtaposition, demonstrating Nanapush's use of traditional oral material, and Erdrich's utilization of it as well, in a literary fashion. It is important to note that Kawbawgam's story is more of a literary transliteration of an actual storytelling event while Tracks presents a version of this story as existing and being transmitted in a living oral culture, albeit a fictional one.

Tracks	*Charles Kawbawgam*
"My story is this," said Nanapush. "There was once a little rain. It fell on a girl's head a drop at a time." I pushed my cup away regretfully. I was uncomfortable and realized I must stop. The old man continued. "The rain got stronger. It began to fall in lines. You know how water hisses down on the lake. It fell like that. It fell and fell. More rain. Then that girl began to float. She was in a deep flood that dragged her all around the earth until she saw something sticking out of the waves. She swam over and clung to it."(149)	*When the flood came, Nanabozho climbed the highest mountain. But the water rose to the top of the mountain. Then Nanabozho climbed a tall pine, but the water rose to the top of the tree. Nanabozho said to the pine: "Brother, stretch.." And the tree stretched his own length. Three times, when the water rose to the top, the pine stretched his own length. (29)*
"The sticking out-thing spoke to the girl, and said if it kept sticking out and saved her, she must do what it wanted afterward. And she agreed." (149) * * * "The water rose," said Nanapush. (149) * * * "It crept up her ankles, then got to her knees. It lapped higher, higher, under her skirt. Then it was up to her waist." (149-50) * * * "The water," said Nanapush, "soon covered her breasts, then rose slowly, higher, to her chin. There it stopped." (150)	*But the fourth time, the tree said that he could stretch no more. Soon the water reached Nanabozho's waist, then his neck.*
"Nine months later," he said, "a little boy came into the world." Between his fingers, he was holding what the men down in Argus called a safety. He began to fill it with sassafras tea, from the spout. Before my eyes, the thin skin elongated and ballooned. I was sick. I began to shake all over, groaned deep in my chest. (151)	*When it was almost up to his mouth, Nanabozho saw a blue heron and said: "Brother, drink up all the water you can hold." Then the heron took his fill and sank from sight. "(29)*
"It was the child of the flood and was nothing but water," said Nanapush. "Time passed and the boy grew and grew. His skin got tighter." Nanapush poured more tea. The others howled and rocked. Wet tears rolled down my cheeks. The safety swelled horribly. Life forever! Eternal peace! I tried to keep my mind stern and pure. The skin burst and a wave poured across the table under Margaret's amused scolding. I said a thousand prayers in one drenched second. I made for the door in a crouching run and didn't care if I failed in the test (151)	*When Nanabozho stepped on the new land, he saw the blue heron lying on the shore with his belly swelled to immense size by the water he had swallowed. Nanabozho kicked him in the belly and the water poured out in such a stream that Nanabozho had to run away to keep from being drowned. (29)*

These are both stories of birth — Kabawgam tells of the birth of the world through the flood, while Nanapush tells of the birth of the *child of the flood*. And in both Kabawgam's and Nanapush's stories the central characters must deal with the threat posed by an impending flood. But the confusion surrounding the Nanapush's *Rain Story* resonates strongly with Pauline's recollection of Jesus' weeping in the garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, and also perhaps with the Judeo-Christian Flood story of Noah and Mary's immaculate conception of Jesus. The cultural codes of penance and redemption, sexual seduction and creation are fully intertwined in the presentation of this *Rain Story*.

This *Rain Story* could be viewed as an embedded narrative in a frame tale[6] structure which temporarily supplants Pauline's narration. This is true as far as the basic narrative structure of Tracks is concerned, but it does not fully account for Nanapush's role as a narrator and character within his own narrative or Pauline's. If I read this story as embedded narrative, then the story that Nanapush tells is merely a mirror text of the primary narrative which Pauline is telling. It creates suspense by presenting the possibility for the primary narrative to follow through with the foreshadowing which is presented in the mirror narrative to which it is not necessarily bound (Bal, 1985, 144-6). The question resulting of this cultural narrative infiltration is: will Pauline's bladder burst?

But reading Tracks as a frame tale does not fully explain Nanapush's innovation using such material. A type of narrative infiltration can be read to occur in the narrative frame of the story that Nanapush tells. This storytelling emphasizes that the spoken word, even in a literary context, will affect not just a narrative perspective but the story itself. As Marie

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[6] A *frame narrative* is one which contains another narrative: the former provides a setting for the latter (Prince, 33). Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (1985), distinguishes between *primary fabula* and *embedded texts* related by successively embedded narrative acts in which another narrative reality is depicted or a new narrative voice is introduced. The embedded story can explain or resemble the primary narrative (143-4).

Maclean argues in Narrative as Performance: A Baudelairean Experiment (1988), "[t]he variables introduced by the context of each particular hearer, interacting with both the context of the teller and that of the telling, are in shifting interplay with the repeated factors of the text"(2). While it can be demonstrated that the *Rain Story* Nanapush tells is a traditional one, it is obvious that he is reshaping it (the version he knows) to match Pauline's situation. Here, the cultural codes that both Nanapush and Pauline rely on can be read to interact with each other. If there is an embedding of narratives occurring here, then it is not one within another, but each within the other. Nanapush is pitting his version of an Ojibwe Trickster story against the penance of physical deprivation that Pauline feels continually compelled to perform. But the narrative penetration occurring is mutual although Nanapush would appear to have the upper hand. As he tells his story she recalls a different one: "I cursed all the talk of water and began a rosary in my thoughts. But I saw the sorrowful mystery, Christ in Gethsemane. He wept a river, and I could not keep from hearing the voice of Nanapush."(149) It is her own recalling of this biblical narrative with plays into Nanapush's intentions in this scene. And this presents a second type of narrative penetration.

When Nanapush tells the "Rain Story" to Pauline, tricking her into giving up her penance of restricted urination, he is acting outside his own narrative frame and has inserted himself into her narrative frame. In this instance, storytelling is not just an entertaining event, but a way of seeing and affecting a present reality. It is at this point of Tracks that Nanapush's storytelling becomes a means of controlling and impinging on the narrative frame presented by Pauline's story. It is this act of storytelling which not only distinguishes Nanapush's narrative from Pauline's, but contextualizes the other stories he tells. Through his storytelling and songs Nanapush refigures himself as a woman and a parent when he saves Lulu from frostbite (167). And when he tells of how he sang to help

Eli hunt he interprets an event at which he was not physically present but affected its outcome.

> I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers, until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and there, in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli's snowshoes clearly. (101)
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> . . .
>
> The moose appeared. I held it in my vision just as it was, then, a hulking male, brown and unsuspicious in the late ordinary light of an afternoon. The scrub it stood within was difficult and dense all around, ready to deflect Eli's bullet.
>
> But my song directed it to fly true. (102)

Even though Nanapush is not present in the scene he describes, his use of language allows him not only to observe the Eli hunting story but ensure to that the hunt is a success.

Similarly, Nanapush's storytelling can be read to penetrate Pauline's own narrative. As a storyteller, Nanapush begins to exercise more creative control in Pauline's narrative. Her position as a listener fits her profile as an invisible narrator; even though when she describes the scene she appears to turn it over to Nanapush, and he quite literally takes over the narrative. "At some point Nanapush took over talking. It was still light out, the dusk about two hours hence. I had become good at calculating winter afternoons"(148-9). Nanapush tenders the bait, sweet sassafras tea, and starts to sweet-talk her into his trap. And this is not just a flood story that he is telling. When Nanapush tells of the "sticking-out thing" that strikes a bargain to save the girl in the story from drowning he is playing on Pauline's sexual frustration and jealousy of Eli and Fleur. The sexual nature of this tale is made all to apparent by Nanapush's gestures to unbutton his pants[7]. He retells the story of

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[7] Most Native American Trickster figures that I have encountered tend to be explicitly sexual. In Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narrative I (1987) Marius Barbeau

Nanapush, matching it to a specific context of audience, time and place and incidence. Indeed, Pauline's own actions, specifically her urinary penance, are deeply impacted by the story Nanapush tells to deceive her into breaking her penance.

But a balance between the traditionally recognizable elements of the story and the shock of innovation must be maintained, and this balance partly results as the teller adjusts the tale according to the response of the audience. "[T]he teller is as much in control of the hearer as the hearer is in that of the teller" (Maclean, 3). While others are present, i.e. the Pillager / Kashpaw family, Pauline is the primary focus of Nanapush's storytelling. What Nanapush does with his story is geared to Pauline's response, indicating that this story is not merely a text, but a performance. She can not hold in the tea Nanapush pours into her own bladder anymore than the condom can hold the sassafras tea Nanapush pours into it (or anything else he might insert). In this instance, Pauline becomes the story: if she were not present, mirroring his story, the joke would be lost. Obviously Nanapush is as much a schemer as he claims Pauline to be.

Pauline's supposed lack of narrative power can be read as a site of resistance against a perceived narrative dominance represented by Nanapush. This is consistent with her transformation as a novitiate in an abbey, into Leopolda. Pauline's name change to Leopolda near the end of Tracks acts in antithesis to Nanapush's perception of names. Names are as important for Pauline as they are for Nanapush, but for precisely the opposite reason. Nanapush uses naming to establish continuity. Pauline's name change is a break with continuity to a tradition that she has come to distrust. Her name change can be read as a decision finally to accept one ideological reality — white Catholicism over a *Native paganism*.

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and William Beynon have documented several cognate tales of Raven making a village woman sick and then posing as a Medicine Man and giving her a prescription to go and sit on a certain stick in the woods. He then goes out into the woods and buries himself except for his erection.

> ... I will pray as I put on the camphor-smelling robes, and thereafter I'll answer to the name I drew from Superior's hand. I prayed before I spread the scrap of paper in air. I asked for the grace to accept, to leave Pauline behind, to remember that my name, any name, was no more than a crumbling skin. (205)
>
> *Leopolda*. I tried out the unfamiliar syllables. They fit. They cracked in my ears like a fist through ice (205).

Pauline's willingness to change her name, redefining herself and her identity, contradicts the epistemology of Nanapush tied to a tradition of story and continuity with the past.

Ostensibly, Pauline's narrative voice remains strictly within those chapters allotted to her: She does not leave her own narrative frame and remains an invisible narrator. While Nanapush's storytelling penetrates Pauline's narrative, her own attempt to infiltrate his narrative relies on a maladjusted faith in Christianity in an attempt to foil Nanapush's healing ritual for Fleur and only ends in a scalding. When Nanapush relates the healing ceremony he performs to heal Fleur, he demonstrates the impotence of Pauline's interruption. "She prayed loudly in Catholic Latin, then plunged her hands, unprepared by the crushed roots and marrows of the plants, into the boiling water. She lowered them farther, and kept them there" (190). But her penances and Catholic Latin cannot prevent her scalded skin from peeling.

But Pauline's apparent invisibility does not leave her powerless. On one occasion she uses love medicine against Fleur in a voyeuristic seduction of Eli and Sophie. Later she uses the prayers of Catholic ritual against Nanapush in an attempt to foil his healing ritual for Fleur. Even when she uses love medicine sexually to entice Eli and Sophie together, Pauline maintains a voyeuristic position. She watches Sophie enviously, observing her secret acts - the way her body curves are unfattened by her sweet tooth.

> Sophie nested close. Her hair spilled across the pillow and clung between my lips. I lay awake for a long while that night, watching her sleep. (77)
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> . . .
>
> I began to observe Sophie during the day as well. (77)

Pauline's gaze is as absorbing as Nanapush's narrative is penetrating. In using Love Medicine to seduce Eli through Sophie, her voyeurism becomes so powerful that she is able to experience their passion in much the same way that Nanapush experiences Eli's hunting of a moose (102). In this scene Pauline might be read to as a trickster, one who sometimes outwits others and is sometimes duped. But she remains apart from the action she narrates.

> I slipped into the woods and took the hidden path around the edge of the field, the path that led straight to the slough. I concealed myself at an opening in the brush, looked out and saw the two of them on the ground ... (83)

She appropriates the experience from her own desire while watching from the bushes.

> He moved his hands up her thighs, beneath the tucked billow of her skirt. She shivered and I dug my fingers through the tough claws of sumac, through the wood-sod, clutched bark, shrank backward into her pleasure. (83)

Normally, most tricksters being sexually unabashed, she might have join in and turned the whole scene into a menage à trois. While her voyeuristic gaze is powerful enough to entice Sophie and Eli together, she is unable to affect Nanapush with the same success.

If Pauline is read as an invisible narrator, the invisibility of her sexuality and her own desires to men becomes apparent. As Daniel Cornell has argued: "[f]emale sexuality, when defined as the object of desire, is denied the possibility of constituting desire. Women may seduce in this phallic dominated system of representation, but they may not desire" (55).

When Pauline attempts to engage Napoleon in sexual intercourse she is no longer invisible and her gaze, no longer that of a voyeur, brings about a sexual stalemate. "I tried to shut my eyes, but couldn't keep them closed, feeling that if I did not hold his gaze he could look at me any way he wanted. So we pressed together with our eyes open, staring like adversaries ..." (73).

Such narrative / sexual tensions can also be read in the context of Nanapush helping Eli to win Fleur's favour —

> I told him what he wanted to know. He asked me the old-time way to make a woman love him and I went into detail so he should make no disgraceful error. (45)

Or it can be seen in the context of Nanapush's contentious relationship to Margaret —

> She hissed. The words flew like razor grass between her teeth.
> "Old man," she scorned, "Two wrinkled berries and a twig."
> "A twig can grow," I offered.
> "But only in the spring." (48)

These same sexual tensions are part of the banter that Margaret and Nanapush use to entice Pauline to reveal what she knows of Fleur's life in Argus (52-3). But the reader knows that Pauline has related this story of events by having read her narrative in chapter two of Tracks. But in this instance her voice is not heard as a storyteller in this scene. These instances of narrative potency in Tracks are also tied to Nanapush's vanity concerning sexual prowess. But if a narrative struggle between Nanapush and Pauline is read in terms of a sexual struggle then Nanapush is perhaps not as consistently potent as he might lead a reader to believe.[8/9] Other incidences show that any narrative penetration that

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[8] Ann Rayson, "Shifting Identity in the Work of Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris" (1991), comments on the issue of male and female voices in Erdrich's writing. She states that male and female Native American voices are present but that female characters are dominant. Tracks seem to reverse this trend somewhat. Rayson argues that the male and female voices

Nanapush may effect is, like his sexual vanity, tenuous. The ability of Nanapush to effect narrative penetration is undermined when he is seen to embrace the world of print and bureaucracy by becoming a tribal chairman, the world that the reader initially sees him rejecting at the beginning of the novel.

> To become a bureaucrat myself was the only way that I could wade through the letter, the reports, the only place where I could find a ledge to kneel on, to reach through the loophole and draw you home. (225)

Nanapush, who "had a Jesuit education in the halls of Saint John before [he] ran back to the woods and forgot all [his] prayers" (33), has perhaps run back to those same halls. In order to bring Lulu back from "the halls of Saint John", the one who claimed a narrative and sexual potency through speech becomes like Pauline: a slave to pieces of paper with names written on them defining who one is and what one does.

> Against all the gossip, the pursed lips, the laughter, I produced papers from the church records to prove I was your father, the one who had the right to say where you went to school and that you should come home. (225)

The name Nanapush on a piece of paper, the name he gave to father Damien as Lulu's father, is the same name he would not tell for the church census. Where once he could out-

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in Erdrich's work are complicated by questions about sexual voice and identity in the context of dual authorship. "Since Erdrich's writing is textured by Dorris' contributions we cannot make statements about "fiction by ethnic women"... or classify Erdrich's works in a gender category" (32-3). This relates directly to the concerns I raise in footnote # 2. Her statement — "Because of their working methods and mixed heritage, it is not possible to separate one authorial voice from another in their works" (35) — does justify to some extent my strategy.

[9] In "The Belly of This Story": Storytelling and Symbolic Birth in Native American Fiction" (1995), Mary Chapman argues that both language and sexual power are generative and in some cases interchangeable. Chapman takes issue with feminist critics Paula Gunn Allen and Linda Danielson for focusing on a gynarchical system that maintains continuity in Native community to the exclusion of a male traditional discourse that can also be generative. Nanapush becomes a parent to Lulu through his storytelling. Conversely, Pauline's denial of her body makes her narrative ungenerative (8-9). The link between the generative capability of speech acts and sexual activity become a means by which authors like Erdrich seem to defuse or disseminate an exclusively female reproductive capacity (14).

talk the gossip and the laughter, Nanapush has become part of a tribe of "single space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees" (225). But is he any less virile, any more diminished for it? After all, he is still a storyteller. And as Erdrich herself has said "not a thing happens, but that it is *really* a tale" (Wong, 38).

Ultimately, in Tracks the reader is left to be seduced by two narrators sitting on either shoulder. Each would have the other be the devil and him or herself the saint. The reader is epistemologically stranded between narratives: one is voyeuristic and the other a penetrator. But both attempt to move back and forth between each other's narratives and between worlds where names are sacred and unprintable, and where pieces of paper with "chicken scratches that can be scattered by a wind" (225) create and substantiate identity and kinship.

Chapter Four:

Ensuing Silences

The answer to the question posed lies within the lines of the story. The reader must figure out from the use of metaphor, the events and the character what the point of transformation or the value of the story is. Our stories merely pose the dilemma.

(Maracle, Sojourner's Truth, 12)

Ensuing Silences

> Literature, which includes ceremony, myth, tale, and song, is the primary mode of the ritual tradition. The tribal rituals necessarily include a verbal element, and contemporary novelists draw from that verbal aspect in their work. (Allen, 80)

Lee Maracle is very conscious of ritual traditional elements of ceremony, myth, tale and song. As a creative writer she is also aware of the cultural hybrid space that she creates by incorporating such elements into her writing. In the introduction to her volume of short stories, Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories (1990), she states:

> In the course of writing these stories I tried very hard to integrate two mediums: oratory and European story, our sense of metaphor, our use of it, with traditional European metaphor and story form. (Sojourner's, 11)

And yet these elements that a reader might consider important indicators of ritual or oral tradition - mythological tales, place names, songs and so on - are not presented as clearly decipherable structures and themes in her novel Ravensong (1990). Its narrative silences and its portrayal of the discontinuity of the oral tradition of a community present a complex of flexible and interconnected narratives that *read* against the imposition of a mechanical and pre-existing structure of a frame tale, or a vertical *hierarchy of narratives*. This and the novel's narrative silences force a reader to make a synchronic reading and acknowledge the interrelations of the various narratives that actually comprise this novel.[1]

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[1] While *synchronism* has traditionally denoted the Saussurean study of interrelations of the elements of a linguistic system at a given point in time, I am using it here to refer to the elements that comprise a specific narrative. Considering my effort to acknowledge oral traditional influences in Ravensong, this application of the term may be more in keeping with

To varying degrees, Ravensong appears to present elements of a West Coast Native oral culture. But what is noticeable about this integration of two media is a tension between what is actually narrated and that which is not narrated but only implied. The unexplained references of "Too much Raven" or "Not enough Raven" or Ella's telling of the story of *Snot Woman* can be read as examples of incomplete representations of oral narratives. In such cases, the reader is made aware of a cultural reference to an oral story or figure but is not allowed to hear or read the content of those stories. This in turn indicates that there are readers who know and readers who do not know the cultural references that are being made. As a reader who is not privy to such cultural references, what can I construct from these ensuing narrative silences? *Why does Maracle employ this narrative strategy* ? The answer to these questions is perhaps tied to the role that Maracle intends the reader to play.

> In the writing of these stories I tried very hard to draw the reader into the centre of the story, in just the same way the listener of our oral stories is drawn in. At the same time the reader must remain central to the working out of the drama of life presented. As listener / reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose. (Sojourner's, 13)

So while Maracle is conscious of the role of the listener / reader in her writing, it is paradoxical that Ravensong fictionally represents instances of oral storytelling events in a manner that is incomplete. While I, the listener / reader, know a story is being told, I am not allowed to hear it. And yet Maracle would have the reader interact more actively in her stories just as a listener of an oral storytelling event might interject, interrupt or even question the storyteller. This points to a question that is of more significance: *What does such a narrative strategy force me, the reader, to do?* There is a sense in which Ravensong

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Abrams' identification of Edward Sapir's and Leonard Bloomfield endeavor to analyze Native American Languages as modes of verbal behavior (Abrams 103).

demands that I construct or reconstruct an *oral* event from a written text which has been deliberately arranged to evoke just such a reading. And, in doing so, my role is altered from being a reader to an alienated listener who is not allowed to hear the story being told.

This silencing of the story can also be seen to operate metaphorically in Ravensong's representation of an oral tradition. In regards to death and how it is culturally processed and distinguished, Ravensong presents the idea of an oral tradition in the juxtaposition of cultural attitudes: Native versus white. At least this is what is presented through Stacey's mental processes.

> And it is this view of loss and death which distinguishes them from the world outside their village. The loss of old people in the village during those ten days cannot be measured. The controversy that raged in the local town newspaper focused on the loss of babies. Stacey realized that white people couldn't conceive of the depth of loss their old people represented - their significance to the villagers escaped them, so they could not empathize with their passing. (94)

Here, the representation of an oral tradition in Ravensong functions as a means to remember and keep alive the history or memory of those who have died. The loss of family members to disease and epidemic represents the elimination of a people and their memories, and the loss of history tied to those memories.

> The loss was total. An untimely death meant everyone lost a family clown, an herbalist, a spirit healer or a philosopher who seemed to understand conduct, law and the connection of one family member to another. Every single person served the community, each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being revolved. A missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced. (26)

Then, in regards to an oral traditional culture, every person in a community is responsible for specific cultural texts because each is a repository of community knowledge. This establishes a continuity with that community's past. In Ravensong the community's perspective on Dominic's death establishes this quite clearly:

> Dominic had been the caretaker of the law and philosophy of the village. As yet no other had come forward to take his place and now the village had no law-giver, no philosopher to consult. They were all like a rudderless ship wandering aimlessly in the fog. (95)

The death of Sadie also stresses the loss of knowledge that death can represent.

> The village had thought they had plenty of time. Sadie was sixty - more than forty years younger than Grampa Thomas. Momma had been going out with her each season for two years now. It was not long enough. There must be a way. There must be some way to rescue this situation. (95)

This loss begins to affect how the community chooses roles for its members to play. When Old Nora takes up the role of a man after her husband dies, the village speaker, Grampa Thomas, explains and justifies it by telling the story of a warrior woman, *She*, the nameless woman of long ago (97). But the death of Grampa Thomas represents a loss of this understanding. When his successor is to be chosen, he is not there to "joggle the story of Speaker and 'She' into place" and Nora is not chosen as speaker (97-9).

With the untimely loss of community members comes a loss of historical continuity and without such continuity the community begins to break down. In this respect, it is entirely appropriate that the story of *Snot Woman* and the phrases "Too much Raven" and "Not enough Raven" present narrative silences. They signify the break in the historical continuity that sustains the community. If the story of *Snot Woman* were told within the narrative, or the references to Raven were fully explained, then the reader would not gain a sense of the

oral discontinuity which is breaking down the community. These silences become narrative symbols indicative of the oral continuity being broken and they resonate through Ravensong.

Susan Lanser, in her chapter "From Person to Persona: The Textual Voice" (The Narrative Act, 1981), argues that the potential of imaginative and structural intricacy presented by a novel creates textual spaces where "'the social function of verbal communication provides a usable mode of artistic structure' by which 'the novelist may transform the simplest prerequisite of ordinary storytelling into a highly effective convention of his art'" (110). Superficially, the representation of an oral tradition in Lee Maracle's Ravensong is less clear than in Louise Erdrich's Tracks. With its bifurcated narration, Erdrich's novel initially allows the reader to isolate and to identify the *fictional* representation of an oral tradition (which it then later confuses). This seems to validate Lanser's romantic claim that

> the semantics of novelistic discourse, with its terms like "teller" and "audience," emphasize oral conventions, perhaps revealing discomfort with the fact of mass communication, a wish to restore the ancient, less complicated relationship between teller, story, and listener that seems to characterize the oral traditions of the epic and the folktale. (110)[2]

Ravensong does present these elements of an oral tradition, *teller, listener* and *story* , but, by contrast, it does not present them in a *less complicated* relationship that she claims characterizes oral traditions. The narrator, the reader and the narration of this story are not easily divided into the roles of *teller, listener* and *story*.

[2] Lanser's characterization of teller, story and listener as part of a less complicated mode of communication and her generalization of oral traditions in terms of epic and folktales is, if not romantic, then simplistic. Epic and folktale can be subdivided into categories of ballad, heroic song, fairytale, legend and saga, to name a few. Because she oversimplifies, it allows her to make the claim that oral traditions have less complicated communication relationships. As well, these categories seem to fit Indo-European oral traditions better than they do Native American or African oral traditions.

In trying to identify the structural and cultural elements which might represent aspects of an oral tradition in Maracle's novel it is perhaps best to begin with the narrative structure that the novel itself seems to present. Ravensong appears to have multiple narrative realities that I would initially assume are created by the dramatized act of storytelling within it. Lanser describes multiple levels of narration like a Chinese box, each successive diegetic level fitting snugly inside the previous (Lanser, 133-4). A story is told within which another character tells a story, within which another character tells a story, and so on. Gérard Genette, in his rather technical Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (1972), describes how the narrator of a second narrative is a character within the first, and that the narration producing a second narrative is an act within the first narrative.

> We define this difference in level by saying that any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed. (Genette, 228)[3]

Mieke Bal, in Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (1985), provides a description of *narrative levels* in reference to Scheherazade in Arabian Nights. Bal makes the distinction between *primary fabula* and *embedded texts* that are related by successively embedded narrative acts which either create a new narrative instance, or introduce a new narrative voice. The embedded story might either explain or resemble the primary story. And in the case of the latter, it is left to the reader to make this connection (143-4). In folklore, this structure *of a tale within a tale within a tale* would be categorized as a frame tale, and superficially Ravensong appears to be arranged in just such a manner. Instances of oral storytelling within the novel, the telling of the *Snot Woman* story or the many references

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[3] ***diegesis*** This technical term refers to the fictional world in which the situations and events being narrated can be read to occur.
diegetic level This refers to the level at which a character, event or act of narration is situated in regards to a given *diegesis* / narrative level. (Prince, 20)

to the figure of Raven, might be read as embedded narratives contained within the narrative reality that documents the story of Stacey's community. But can such a hierarchical arrangement of Ravensong's narratives be read consistently? If elements of the oral and written traditions are to be seen to interact, how can such a reading be maintained? To consider Maracle's possible intention that the reader of this novel become a trickster suggests that she intends for the reader to break down such a rigid reading and *be the architect* of a literary transformation. Using the basic structure of a frame tale, the reading of a hierarchy of narratives within Ravensong begins to break down in the following manner:

The opening pages of Ravensong present a pantheon of ambiguous anthropomorphisms of seemingly divine figures: Raven, Cedar, Wind and Cloud.

> Wind changed direction, blowing the song toward cedar. Cedar pick up the tune, repeated the refrain, each lacey branch bending to echo ravensong. Cloud, seduced by the rustling of cedar, moved sensually to shore. (9)

This opening of Ravensong, introducing Cedar and Raven, might be read as a story of origin that provides a mythic and cultural framework for the rest of the novel. But instead of being the first level in a hierarchy of narrative realities, it creates a narrative reality in which the supernatural and the natural are read to co-exist. This seems to exemplify Paula Gunn Allen's claim that "[r]itual-based cultures are founded on the primary assumption that the universe is alive and that it is supernaturally ordered"(Allen, 80). But of these characters, only Raven and Cedar maintain a continual and active presence throughout the novel, and Raven is clearly the most developed of these two. The development of these characters of Raven and Cedar[4] seems shallow, and so the full development of their traits is superseded by

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[4] By comparison with Raven, Cedar is a less developed and less active character. But Cedar also actively intervenes in the story interacting with other characters —

what they do. In an oral tradition, in the act of telling a story, the development of action usually takes precedence over the development of character.[5] Their presence in the novel seems to be part of an attempt at the creation of a world that tries to balance a mythic and tribal world with one where epidemic, disease and tragedy seem to rule.

This mythic portrayal of Cedar and Raven might imply a mythic world that frames the story of Stacey's struggles in an urban white school and her own community's struggle for survival. Within such a mythic drama a reader would see a young girl, Celia, watching Wind playing with Cloud and listening to the song Cedar sings while having a vision of the past. There is a brief shifting back and forth between separate realities, one which is narrated within another. Celia's vision, implicitly linked to her surrounding environment, can then be read as a shift in narrative levels, one which links the story about to take place with the past.

> Below cedar a small girl sat. She watched for some time the wind playing with cloud. Above, she felt the presence of song in the movement of cedar's branches. She surrendered to movement, allowing the sound to spiral her into reverie. Her body began to float. Everything non-physical inside her sped up. The song played about with the images inside. She stared blankly at some indefinable spot while the river became the sea, the shoreline shifted to a beach she couldn't remember seeing, the little houses of today faded. In their place stood the big houses of the past. Carved double-headed sea serpents guarded the entrance to the village of wolf clan. (9-10)

> There was something inside Stacey that Celia could not yet know about. Cedar brushed Celia's cheek with her lower branch, a soft caress from the smooth side of the needles, changing the direction of her thinking. She got up to look for someone to play with.(62)

[5] This is what is usually assumed from the perspective of folklore analysis. Having personally trained as an oral storyteller I tend to agree that the development of action takes precedence over that of character. But this is not to claim that the latter plays no importance in oral story development.

This vision of the past, in which a Native coastal community experiences its first encounter with Europeans, presents the possibility of a subordinated narrative reality, one which provides a historical perspective of a past community's encounter with sexually transmitted disease to frame the main story that occupies most of Ravensong. But the shift to the narrated reality represented in this vision is ambiguous. Celia's presence can still be seen from within her vision itself as if she were a character reacting directly to the events that are seen.

> Young women were sent aboard the ship - fifty in all.
>
> The child's body seized up, twisted itself into fetal position. The women were returned to the village. They became the first untouchable victims of disease. (10)

And this vision ends with Celia's return to the village where a funeral is taking place begins the story of a community's struggle to deal with issues of epidemic and its own disintegration.

Another possible narrative level is evoked in the telling of "Snot Woman" creating intertextual references to a body of oral knowledge of the community.

> "Must be some story." She [Ella] winked lasciviously at Stacey. 'Eh?' she asked, whaeking Stacey lightly again. She retold the story of Snot Woman, a story full of risqué humour and passion. It started to read differently to Stacey. The loyalty of Snot Woman was tied to the ability of her silly husband to gratify her passion. Stacey figured out halfway through the story ... (105)

This is just one instance where the reader is allowed to witness the act of storytelling without hearing the story itself. As such, it represents an incomplete creation of a subordinated narrative reality. The *Epilogue* that concludes Ravensong can also be read as the creation of a narrative reality that is similarly incomplete.

> "That was 1954," Stacey heard herself say some twenty-five years later. 'It was the last epidemic we fought as a community. ... (197)
>
> . . . .
>
> The story had begun as an answer to her son's question, "Why did little Jimmy shoot himself?" (197)

This begins the epilogue to Ravensong. Although the reader never really reads/hears this story, it is clear that Stacey is the narrator of another narrative level. But it is unclear whether this presents the possibility that she is perhaps the narrator for the whole novel. If she is not, then the reader is only able to fill in this narrative silence by reading the whole novel into her narration.

It is interesting to note the phrases "Not enough Raven" and "Too much Raven" repeated throughout the novel and reiterated in *Epilogue* to Ravensong. They create an impending sense of upheaval that is exhibited not only in the social action of the story but also in how a hierarchical reading of Ravensong breaks down. Such statements might be references to another level of narration, the frame in which Raven might be read to exist. This along with Celia's vision inspired by Raven's song draws the reader back to the opening phrase of Ravensong. "From the depths of the sound Raven sang a deep wind song, melancholy green" (9). This resonates with the novel's title to suggest two possibilities: First this novel might be read as Raven's song, or second, it is a song of Raven. On one hand, Raven might be read as the dominant narrator of this novel, providing the narrative frame in which the story takes place. On the other, this novel might be read as a song about Raven, in which Stacey is conceivably the narrator who provides the framing narration.

But a concern with who might be supplying the novel's narrative framework focuses on incomplete or ambiguous shifts from what might be labelled as this framing narrative

(narratologically, the first diegetic level) to successive narrative levels and back again does not occur. Instead, it is more appropriate to say that Raven and Cedar and Celia and Stacey inhabit the same narrative reality. For example, from Stacey's perspective a raven is not merely a raven.

> Raven still sat on the fence enclosing the graveyard. She squawked. Stacey cast a look in her direction. She studied the raven, whose chin jutted straight out while she squawked. She had the feeling Raven was mocking her, bragging, telling her she wasn't very clever ... (16)

But from Raven's perspective, she herself is constantly isolated from the very people she is trying to help.

> Raven shrieked one more time in a last bid for the attention of those in the room. None heard. She began to think her plan might not work. Doubt invaded Raven's spirit ... (54)

Raven's role in this novel, that of a Trickster operating as a figure of social upheaval, plays a part in breaking down any reading of a hierarchical narratives in Ravensong. Naming Raven obviously links her to an oral traditional figure in much the same way a literary citation might make a reference.

In order for the reader to understand this *intertextual* reference, a common knowledge of this traditional figure is required. Raven seems to fit the traits of many other Native American tricksters: Nanabush (Ojibwe and Anishinaabe), Wîsahkêcâhk (Cree), Wadjunkaga (Winnebago), to name but a few. Generally, these Tricksters tend to be wanderers with voracious appetites for food and sex. According to Karl Kerenji the Trickster can be understood as the *spirit of disorder* who introduces chaos to ordered life, through deception, slyness, and even stupidity, to make possible experiences that would

not normally be permitted (174-5). In various ethnological and anthropological sources, such as Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I (1987), Henry Tate's The Porcupine Hunter and Other Stories: The Original Tsimshian Texts of Henry Tate (1993), and Franz Boas' Tsimshin Mythology (1916 / 1970), Raven wanders the world in search of food and women to fulfill his voracious hunger and sexual appetite. But along the way this Trickster violates social customs and taboos concerning sex and food - it is a thief of both. And as often as the trickster is clever enough to fool others, it is also fool enough to be duped itself.[6]

A major distinction between traditional tricksters and Maracle's portrayal of Raven is that her trickster appears to have a clearly identifiable goal to enact a specific social transformation. In anthropological documentation Tricksters most often appear as liminal figures who fool others and are fooled because that is who they are and what they do. They do not conceive of grand earthshaking designs beyond the immediate appeasement of their hunger. But Tricksters can also be divine figures. Various collected narratives of West Coast Native trickster figures that I have examined[7] portray the Trickster (Txamsen,

[6] Anthropological depictions of Native North American trickster figures tend to portray it as a male figure. Native trickster as female seem to have developed in the domain of creative literary efforts. Tomson Highway's Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, Beth Brant's "Coyote Learns a New Trick" and Lee Maracle's Ravensong are three significant examples of Native trickster figures being recast as female. In this context it is not surprising that Stacey's mother chastises her with the *Story of Raven's folly* for visiting Rena, a local lesbian woman, without proper permission (125). This of course raises the following question concerning the representation of North American trickster figures: Is the traditionally male depiction of trickster figures in anthropology natural or are they gendered portrayals a resulting from the sensibilities and prejudices of those who wrote such documents? The fact that Maracle is not Tlingit or Tsimshian might make her representation of Trickster problematic for some, but then Tate, Boas, and Barbeau were not Native either. Such regendering of the Trickster by authors like Tomson Highway and Lee Maracle may be a political means to reappropriate a cultural figure from such anthropological and ethnological representations. As well, a female Trickster need not be any less hungry or sexual in her appetites than her male incarnation.

[7] (Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I (1987), Henry Tate's The Porcupine Hunter and Other Stories: The Original Tsimshian Texts of Henry Tate (1993), and Franz Boas' Tsimshin Mythology (1916 / 1970).

or Wiget/ Wi-gat[8]) and his brother as divine figures. In many of these examples he is the son of "the great Chief-of-the-skies". This chief "said to each as he spat in their ears, 'You will have supernatural powers and you will go about to all the world making it better for all the people in the world'" (Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I 1987, 10). In Ravensong, the strong emphasis on Raven as a divine figure with transformative powers makes her appear as a trickster figure whose consciously motivated designs enact a social chaos for the betterment of society. But making the world better does not necessarily fit the conceptions of what one normally considers an improvement. The trickster in Ravensong claims to have precipitated the epidemic that will engulf Stacey's village. "Raven was convinced that this catastrophe she planned to execute would finally wake the people up, drive them to white town to fix the mess over there"(14). And it is Raven's "deep wind song, melancholy green"(9) that evokes Celia's vision. Ultimately this is a figure operating in the margins of the story, violating social and cultural convention to enact a social transformation. To illustrate this I refer to an alternative narrative example.

The use of oral stories and traditional figures like Raven in Ravensong's is similar to the presentation of the life stories in Life Lived Like a Story (1990). In this collaborative text Kitty Smith, Angela Sydney and Annie Ned are clearly the storytellers who orally create their autobiographies. In her introduction to Life Lived Like a Story, Julie Cruikshank outlines a significant motivation behind the collaborative effort which produced this book.

> One aspect of storytelling that does seem to survive translation is the way narrators use stories to explain a particular point they are making. It is this sense of stories as explanation that I have tried to capture here by alternating accounts of personal

[8] The English spelling variations of these names do vary from text to text. The standard version of these two names seems to have been established by Beynon and Barbeau (see Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes: Tsimshian Narratives I (1987). As well, the prevalence of one name or the other will depend on whether the textual source concerned is documenting

> experience with traditional narratives. By arranging the life histories this way, I am attempting to show two things: first, how each woman is using stories to explain events in her life, and second, how each brings special narrative skills to the construction of her account. (17)

In Life Lived Like a Story there is a constant transition between those stories that document a past personal experience and those stories that are mythological tales, place names, and songs, which a strictly literary notion of narrative would regard as archaic and extraneous.[9] As Allen states: "The structure of the stories out of the oral tradition ... tend to meander gracefully from event to event; the major unifying device, besides the presence of certain characters in a series of tales, is the relationship of the tale to the ritual life of the tribe" (152-3).

The various narratives in Ravensong seem to be arranged more similarly to those personal life histories told by Angela Sydney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned. It is not clear that a *narrative frame* presented at the beginning of Ravensong is complete on its own. If this novel were truly comprised of a frame tale, there would be a shift between levels of narration that might be viewed as a vertical hierarchical structure. But there is no complete descent or ascent back up to the original fabula, and the conclusion of Ravensong cannot be read as a shift back to the original narrative level invoked in the beginning of the story. All

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Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit culture.

[9] For example, in Life Lived Like a Story Angela Sydney tells stories that are reminiscent of classic European fairytales, so many of which begin with the formulaic phrase *Once upon a time*. At one point she uses a phrase "One time, long ago, a chief ... came in from Angoon" ("Deisheetaan History", 37) to begin an origin story of her people. Other stories, such as "How the Animals Broke Through the Sky" or "Game Mother", are introduced with such seemingly stock phrases as "One time the sky used to come right down to the saltwater" (48), or "This is the story of how game animals used to be"(44). And interspersed in between these "mythological" tales or legends are more *historical narratives*. Opening phrases such as "Now I'll tell my dad's side"("Dakl'aweidí History"). But these stories do not exist within the Chinese box structure of a frame tale that Lanser outlines (133-4). Such narrative distinctions disintegrate when it is realized that "Deisheetaan History" and "How the Animals Broke Through the Sky" operate horizontally in relation to one another. They are not told within the frame of any preceding narrative, but they operate independently and yet in thematic and cultural relation to each other.

this leads me to think that a hierarchical mapping of narrative levels in Ravensong that would be endorsed by Lanser (or for that matter, according to narrative principles outlined by Genette and Bal)[10] is inadequate and that a more horizontal and egalitarian reading of narrative relations would be appropriate. Ravensong is more appropriately read as a series of co-existing and correlated narrative dialogues. The various narrative realities in the novel appear to coexist horizontally in relation to each other creating an interplay of multiple voices subsumed within a dominant third-person narration. The opening of the novel does not conclude Ravensong; instead it ends with a scene in which Stacey herself is ambiguously implicated as the possible third-person narrator of the whole book.

A rigid reading of Ravensong as a story presented within the narrative frame of a mythic world that exists apart from the rest of the story begins to break down further when I realize that, besides the fact that there is no hierarchical shift in narration, full representation of narrative levels within the novel are not complete. Life Lived Like a Story presents multiple but interdependent narratives of the personal life histories told by Angela Sydney, Kitty Smith and Annie Ned. And the bifurcated narrative of Tracks seems predicated to reveal two perspectives of the same story. This is exemplified by the presentation of Nanapush's narrative of the *Rain Story* (149), or Pauline's descriptive narrative of her seduction of Eli through Sophie (77-84) which are more or less full disclosures. By contrast, the acts of storytelling in Ravensong are presented as narrative silences. Here, the representation of oral narrative is not complete and the reader is instead kept at a distance. As a reader, I am allowed to see who the teller and listener / audience

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[10] Susan Lanser distinguishes embedded narratives level from one perspective - the shift or descent through the various levels of embedded narration - and does not mention the shift back or ascension back to the framing narrative. Genette refers to this narrative shifting with terms *metanarrative* (a narrative within a narrative) and *metadiegesis* (the universe or reality of this embedded narrative) (228) Genette also makes the distinction that not every instance of embedded narration produces a spoken narrative, but that written textual narrations such as letters, memos, etc. are also possible (230).

are, but I am only privy to the scene as far as it seems necessary to indicate that a story is being told. After that I am cut off. It is as if I am a voyeur outside the house looking in through the window, and the scene framed within that window is not audible to me.

From a reader's perspective, Ella's telling of the story of "Snot Woman" is a brief example of how a narrative silence is established.

> The loyalty of Snot Woman was tied to the ability of her silly husband to gratify her passion. Stacey figured out halfway through the story that Ella was giving her mother permission to satisfy her passions in any time, in any way she chose. (105-6)

This is an example of storytelling as a means of social explanation and communication. It plays an integral part in explaining the actions of Ned towards his brother's widow, Stacey's mother, and Stacey's own understanding of family, particularly in regards to the revelation that Ned is her surrogate father. But while the narrator interprets the story allowing me to know its significance to Stacey, I never hear the story. This argument can also be extended to the phrases *Too Much Raven* —

> Too much Raven . . . was this what Momma had meant? She would get herself in trouble one day with her disregard for propriety and authority - law, Momma had called it. Law. Her understanding of this law confused her. (125) —

or *Not enough Raven* —

> "Why did we pay attention to them, of all people?" Rena repeated.
>
> "Not enough Raven," Stacey answered. They laughed some more. Jacob wasn't sure what wheels he had turned in the women's minds but he knew the story was not over. He wanted to know how "not enough Raven," had decided their fate. (199)

By referring to *Raven* within the novel, or to a number of anthropological sources of

Raven, I gain a sense of understanding of this reference. But within the immediate context in which these utterances are made, there is very little provided to help me access what appears to be a private joke. Whether this narrative silence was intended depends on the assumption that the intended reader does not belong to the same community which already knows what such references mean.[11]

The *Epilogue* of Ravensong also presents an incomplete representation of a narrative reality. Stacey's voice as a narrator in the *Epilogue* might be read to represent a shift towards the *oral discontinuity* and narrative silence that I described earlier. To fill in the narrative silence is to read the novel itself as a flashback contained within the *Epilogue*. "'That was 1954' Stacey heard herself say some twenty-five years later. . . . The story had begun as an answer to her son, Jacob's question, 'Why did little Jimmy shoot himself?'"(197). Stacey heard herself say some twenty-five years later"(Ravensong, 197). This last chapter of Ravensong, when read back over the rest of the novel as a flashback, creates a sense of words enacted and lived, retroactively framing the novel as a family history told in a family setting. Numerous resonances echo backwards through the story. In telling the story to her son, Stacey begins to re-establish some sense of this lost continuity. Here the signified act of storytelling creates a sense of explanation and healing in which little Jimmy's death is contextualized within the past event of Polly's death. But is this an implication of Stacey as the primary narrator? The reader is able to witness the conclusion of Stacey's story in the story that they have just finished in the preceding chapters if her narrative voice is then read back through the novel. Again, while I know

[11] It may be that these stories of Raven are referred to but not told because they are sacred. I have personally encountered taboo practices concerning use of names and specific types of stories (most particularly the Algonquian cannibal figure Wihtiko, and the Cree and Ojibwe Tricksters Wisikecak and Nanabush. But the effect created by such references remains the same. A narrative silence occurs for a reader who is not familiar with trickster figures, in this case Raven.

Stacey has told some sort of personal oral history, it has been displaced by the third-person narration that dominates the whole book. While I can read that Stacey has told a story, I am not allowed to read / hear it. This displacement of Stacey's narrative and the silence that ensues is consistent with the narrative silences that have already been established in the novel. The reader does not find out who little Jimmy is except that he is Stacey's nephew and that Stacey has made some connection between his suicide and Polly's. What is the story of Jimmy? And the reader is not the only one with questions. "Jacob wasn't sure what wheels he had turned in the women's minds but he knew the story was not over. He wanted to know how 'not enough Raven' had decided their fate" (199).

The reader remains a voyeur witnessing the conclusion of a story recounting the disintegration of a community which is tearing these families apart. It is presented in Celia's vision as a plague caused by sexual interaction with foreigners and becomes an undercurrent theme throughout the rest of Ravensong. In the end the motivation behind Stacey's storytelling is similar to Nanapush's telling Lulu the story of her mother in Tracks. The deaths in Celia's vision, Polly's suicide and the deaths of Dominic and Sadie, all echo forward into the story that Stacey has just finished telling in the *Epilogue.* And here the story of disintegration and survival of family and community that Ravensong tells becomes Stacey's story to her son Jacob when she explains Jimmy's suicide.

If I understand Ravensong as a series of interrelated narrative acts then this *Epilogue*, in which Stacey is seen to tell the story of Polly's suicide, can be read as an act of re-interpretation and understanding of her nephew's suicide. Ella's telling of the *Snot Woman* story within its own context can also be read similarly, as a social narrative act that helps Stacey come to an understanding of her mother's situation after the death of her father. And the narrative silences surrounding the phrases *Too much Raven* and *Not enough Raven* , echoed throughout Ravensong and reiterated in the *Epilogue*, resonate with the figure of

Raven in the novel's opening pages to establish a narrative continuity of internal referencing that creates a sense of organic storytelling. This in part substantiates Paula Gunn Allen's claim that contemporary novelists draw on ritual tradition to create the sense of a meandering narrative structured by the relationship of tales to the people who tell them: "the major unifying device, besides the presence of certain characters in a series of tales, is the relationship of the tale to the ritual life of the tribe"(152-3). Ultimately, this demands not only close reading but willingness to let go of any need to box the story in and leave nothing to the imagination, even as it demands that I the listener / reader enact and construct a social transformation of it. Or as Maracle herself says:

> The answer to the question posed lies within the lines of the story. The reader must figure out from the use of metaphor, the events and the character what the point of transformation or the value of the story is. Our stories merely pose the dilemma. (Sojourner's Truth, 12)

Chapter Five:

Rereading Native Literature

writing cannot cross (out or over) writing without questioning the material (here, language) that defines it

(Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other, 60)

Rereading Native Literature

Reading Tracks and Ravensong as narrative interactions presents the possibility of identifying those oral traditional elements of speaker, listener and story text that have been fictionally replicated in these two novels. In them the reader is presented with narratives that demonstrate a high degree of flexibility in representing and incorporating oral traditional material. Both can be seen as examples of how elements of an oral tradition can infiltrate the novel.[1] The representation of aspects of oral traditions in these two novels can be seen as examples of narrative hybridity that blends literary notions of narrative and oral storytelling. Tracks and Ravensong challenge hierarchical arrangements of their narratives. And in breaking down a hierarchy of narrative levels, Tracks and Ravensong begin to combine what some might regard as diametrically opposed discourses - the literary and the oral traditional. Their narrative fluidity challenges any perceptions of *Native literature* in which narratives are read with linear perceptions of the past and present, and social and cultural facts are fixed and homogenizing. Instead, both novels create a social-cultural context in which oral storytelling

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1 Examples of oral traditional material structuring the literature in which it is represented can be seen in numerous instances of interplay between oral and textual communities in Europe. Walter J. Ong claims that although universities of the Middle Ages cultivated literacy, oral modes of thought and expression infiltrated those institutions to a considerable degree.

> All assaying of intellectual prowess and accomplishment was oral, in disputations and the like, so that the intellectual world, while styled largely by writing, was in performance oral to a degree difficult for high-technology literates to conceive (Ong, "Text as Interpretation", 161).

He also documents that in the Council of Trent, 1546 Catholic theologians relied on both written books, the Bible, and *unwritten traditions* received in the Apostolic tradition as a sort of second volume of the Bible in their hermeneutical practices (168).

is related, and again in both cases it is not possible to separate the text of a story from its social and cultural context. This indicates that perhaps a more open way of writing about (and not just a recategorization of) Native literature is needed.

In regards to actual living oral traditions, Tracks and Ravensong both provide particular representations in fictionally contextualized forms, but they have similarities and dissimilarities in how they do this. Both novels present storytelling as an explanation of the present in the context of past events, and therefore demonstrate a means of establishing a continuity with that past. In Tracks, Nanapush's motivation to tell Fleur's story is to instill in Lulu some loyalty to her mother, Fleur. And he also tells Lulu the story of how she got her name - one's history becomes one's identity. In the 'Epilogue' of Ravensong Stacey's motivation to tell the story of Polly's suicide is not merely an attempt to understand the suicide of her nephew, Jimmy: it can also be read as re-establishing a connection with a lost history of a community. Ironically, storytelling about death may be a means of maintaining community history. One might not remember the actual texts of the stories anymore, but there is still the story of their loss. But the representation of an oral tradition in these novels appears to have necessitated different narrative negotiations from Erdrich and Maracle. In Tracks, Erdrich has created a series of contesting narratives to create a narrative ambiguity that allows for a relatively full but fictional representation of oral voices. In Ravensong Maracle also creates a juxtaposition of narrative disclosure and narrative silence.

The narrative in Tracks operates on the basis of a double disclosure through the juxtaposition of two narrative perspectives. The narratives of Nanapush and Pauline are not separate or independent, but rather each demonstrates instances of an attempt to infiltrate and co-opt the other. Nanapush's *Rain Story* told within Pauline's narration is perhaps the clearest example of this (148-51). As well, each narrator articulates a significant maliciousness towards the other.

> [W]hile I was careful with my known facts, she was given to improving truth.
>
> Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage. (37)

And while Pauline is clearly at odds with Nanapush in a narrative contest, this can be set in the larger context of her jealousy of Fleur and a Catholic novitiate's malicious intent towards men in general and the superstitions of the *pagan religion* that Nanapush practices.

> [I]t was clear that Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster, wanted [Fleur] for himself. He's a devil, that one, love hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur. (11)

This creates a sense of balance in which the reader is allowed to see *both sides of the story*. The fact that the reader is allowed to read/hear these narratives interact with, invade and infiltrate the other breaks down the initial separation of these two narratives.

Ravensong also presents a type of narrative contest, but one that is created through the juxtaposition of narrative disclosure and narrative silence. In specific instances Ravensong presents the oral voice as a silence — scenes in which I the reader am aware that oral texts are being spoken but remain unvoiced. Throughout, references to cultural figures and stories create a sense of cultural inclusion and exclusion. There is a sense in which Maracle is deliberately including some readers and excluding others from various parts of the story. But any narrative juxtaposition in Ravensong is in part constructed by the reader's balancing act of what is known and not known in relation to its narrative silences.

This juxtaposition of narrative disclosure and narrative silence can be read in the disparities between town and the Native community being depicted. The racial tension of inclusion and exclusion is mirrored in the interaction of Steve and Stacey when she plays on his guilt over the flu epidemic and the deaths that afflicted the village.

> "How did it feel to watch us die, Steve?" she asked. It was mean. She didn't care much that it was mean. Steve blushed. His father was one of the white doctors who could not possibly be expected to cross the river to treat "those" people. (186)

It is clear that such tension represented in Ravensong is contextualized by the distinctions of culture that allow the characters in the novel to categorize German Judy as white instead of identifying that she is *not Indian* -

> "She's white and so she don't count," Momma snapped. Stacey thought that was mean. (123)

- and distinguish Steve as *not Indian* instead of white.

> "Is it because I am white?" he asked without bothering with the first part of the question.
>
> "No," she answered softly, "it's because you aren't Indian." She couldn't sort out the difference between these two approaches clearly enough to explain, so she just rose to leave. (185)

But while the juxtaposition of narrative disclosure and silence is made within the context of such racial distinctions, Raven's plan to visit the catastrophe of a flu epidemic upon Stacey's village pushes me to break down this separation. And this scene where Stacey watches Steve crossing the bridge separating the village from the *white town* figuratively raises the question of how far a cultural separation of narratives can be extended in the novel.

It is perhaps more appropriate to read Tracks and Ravensong as examples of narrative interaction in which a hybridity of literary and oral cultures occurs But reading any aspect of an oral tradition, or the literary representation of an oral tradition, through the imposition of a literary perception without an understanding of the dynamics of that tradition is to box it in

and make it into something else. In Woman, Native, Other (1989) Trinh T. Minh-ha discusses perceptions of storytelling in anthropology. She uses a deliberate conflation of terms that at first confuse and then reassess and redefine the empirical *scientific method* of anthropological observation and discourse and then relabels it as "myth of mythology"(59) or "gossip about gossip"(70) Trinh Minh-ha takes issue with the ways in which such *scientific* disciplines as anthropology once *objectively* defined their description of the exotic, the other, the Native. If such an argument can be applied to Life Live Like a Story or The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems From the Swampy Cree Indian it may also be applied to the literary reading of Tracks and Ravensong I present in Chapters Three and Four. To apply a hierarchical structure to a narrative and then demonstrate how it breaks down, all the while making that argument within hierarchical and structural arrangements, is to re-establish that which I have attempted to disassemble. Rather, the application of such reading strategies requires constant adjustment. If I then claim that Tracks and Ravensong challenge commonly accepted notions of narrative and storytelling, it would be inappropriate to say that they can be read from only that one perspective. In reference to these two novels the adjustment required of various reading perspectives can be briefly demonstrated with reference to the following reading strategies: protest literature, Magic Realism, and a Bakhtinian reading.

Read as protest literature, Tracks and Ravensong share some similarities despite the apparent geographical disparities in their depictions. Both portray instances of cultural tension that might be viewed as sites of political resistance. And clearly, in light of the historical experiences of the Native Americans subjected to genocidal policies enacted by governments in Canada and the United States, or protests in events surrounding Wounded Knee, Oka, Kanesetake, and Kanawake, the depiction of Native communities represented in these two novels might acquire a particular resonance. In Ravensong Stacey defies her school principal when she is continually late for school because of the flu epidemic

affecting her village. Her own disruption of school authority foregrounds a larger cultural tension in which *Indians* are challenging "an unspoken assumption: White folks were more deserving of medical care. There is a hierarchy to care" (96).

> She became a conundrum in the school. She was issued detention after detention. Two detentions for not showing up for the first detention, until she owed more detentions than there were school days left. Mr. Johnson couldn't relinquish his now vaporous pretense of power yet he could not bring himself to expel her. Stacey didn't bother to think much about the hold she seemed to have on Mr. Johnson; she just carried on as she pleased. (68)

And in Tracks, Nanapush's view of his name as sacred makes his refusal to let it be written down just as much a political act of resistance:

> My girl, listen well. Nanapush is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file. That is why I only gave it out once in all those years.
>
> *No Name*, I told Father Damien when he came to take the church census. *No Name*, I told the Agent when he made up the tribal roll.
>
> "I have the use of a white man's name," I told the Captain who delivered the ration payout for our first treaty, "but I won't sign your paper with that name either." (32-33)

But this type of reading only serves to oversimplify these two novels, dividing the communities portrayed into *us* and *them* and reduces them to political manifestoes on the issues of cultural prejudice and appropriation. Tracks and Ravensong also portray Native people with the capacity to harm and deceive each other as much as they might be taken advantage of by *white people* . In Ravensong *the old snake's* abuse of his family - "The

snake had violated his daughter, his own daughter" (162) - is problematic in this respect in that it shows that the Native community being depicted is not exempt from the same problems that plague the white people in the story. And this scene echoes in Stacey's discovery of the reasons behind Polly's suicide: "Her dad was an alcoholic, beat both Polly and her mom regular ..." (184). And in Tracks Nanapush confronts the Indian Agent, claiming that the taxes on the Pillager land allotment were paid, only to discover the deception perpetuated by his own lover Margaret Kashpaw and her son Nector.

> "Oh yes," agreed the Agent, remembering. "The Kashpaws did bring in a good sum to me, but you are mistaken about where it went. Nector and his mother paid that money down on the Kashpaw allotment. (207)

So the tensions portrayed in these novels are not merely the result of racial conflict (although this is present) but also the result of communities struggling to survive a crisis - in Ravensong a flu epidemic has struck the Native village and in Tracks the Native peoples are caught in a struggle to survive a harsh winter and retain their land rights.

Tracks and Ravensong might also be characterized as literary examples of *Magic Realism*. But this term in literary criticism is imprecise and has a history of ambiguity in a conflation of meanings and other terms that have been used in connection with it. Literature that utilizes *Magic Realism* achieves its effects through the realistic representation of events that are fantastic, absurd or impossible (Abrams, 174). According to Amaryll Chanady, "The Origins and Development of Magic Realism in Latin American Fiction" (1986), Magic Realism can be defined as an interpretation of literature that is ideologically bound to the idea of European supercivilization and the savagery of a primitive America.

> [M]agico-realist narratives are those in which the portrayal of supernatural forces arising from an indigenous world-view is interwoven with the description of

> contemporary society with its political and social problems. Once this literary mode is traced to Latin American syncretism, it is easy to go one step further and consider any fictitious juxtaposition of the natural and the supernatural as belonging to the mode. (50)

Chanady goes on to describe the term *Magic Realism* as being fraught with contradictions and ambiguities which arise from its amorphous origins in the world of art criticism.[2] Chanady makes the argument that Magic Realism operates by employing an explicitly metafictional device of defamiliarization, by which a narrator's own defamiliarization of reality is highlighted. She concludes that magic realist literature is a hybrid born out of a process in which Latin American authors combined European and North American literary innovations.

In his 1985 essay "The Metamorphosis of Space: Magic Realism" Robert Wilson discusses Magic Realism as if it were a juxtaposition of geographical textual spaces that can be negotiated and transformed. "Imagine literature as a large field divided into separate play-areas: the rules that seem to make one activity possible preclude the playing of others" (61). Citing Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Kroetsch's What the Crow Said, Wilson examines how magic realist literature (as a type or a genre) is able to create a hybridity of realities. "It is as if there are two worlds — distinct, following dissimilar laws — which

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[2] Chanaday has traced the term to Franz Roh, who introduced the term in 1925 as an aesthetic category referring to a mode of reacting to reality and pictorially representing the mysteries inherent in it. She argues that this term was co-opted in Latin American in the 1940's in an effort to express an authentic American mentality and develop an autonomous literature (Magical Realism, 17). She discusses the difficulties in defining this oxymoronic term and documents its development and application to Latin American creative writing with regards to such authors as Alejo Carpentier of Cuba, Carlos Fuentes, Ecuadorian novelist Demetrio Aguilera Malta and Uslar Pietri. She also deals with their critical reception by such literary and art critics as: Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, Franz Roh, Ray Vergasconi, Massimo Bontempelli, Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, and Enrique Anderson Imbert (Magical Realism and The Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony, 1985).

interact, interpenetrate and interwind, unpredictably but in a natural fashion" (71). And so he posits the principle of spatial folding within a text, or world — interpenetration which allows for the representation of different realities as co-existing and interdependent, but without the need for independent or exterior justification.

Viewed from these perspectives, Tracks' and Ravensong's rendering of ordinary events and descriptive details, together with those characteristic of fairytales and myth, might place them in the category of Magic Realism. If I identify realistic cultural spaces in them then they both portray struggles that surround family losses. In Tracks there is the loss of land and the physical and cultural sustenance that is tied to it. When Fleur loses the Pillager land allotment for not paying taxes, her family, which has survived numerous struggles before this, begins to disintegrate. And losing access to the lake on the land allotment precipitates the loss of a spiritual connection with the guardian Misshepeshu whose perceived malevolent nature provides the lake with its name, Matchimanito[3]. Ravensong portrays the effects of family losses when an epidemic steals not only people from Stacey's community but also the memories and the history that those people hold. People in a community represent physically embodied memories, and when someone dies before passing on those memories, that community's continuity with the past is affected.

Within these *realistic* contexts the fantastic does occur. In Tracks there is Nanapush's vision in which he accompanies Eli on a hunting trip (100-4). Pauline's voyeuristic seduction of Eli through Sophie using love medicine apparently allows her to access sexual

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[3] The roman alphabet spelling of this word does seem to vary. In Cree - English / English Cree Dictionary (1995) Fr. Gérard Beaudet has spelt it *Matchimanito*. In Cree language studies with Emily Hunter, University of Alberta, School of Native Studies I have learned to spell it *mácimanito*. The Ojibwe word *Matchimanito* appears to be a cognate of *Mácimanito*. According to An Ojibwa Lexicon (1983) edited by G. L. Piggott and A Grafstein *macimanito* might denote a bad or evil spirit, person or place.

experience that otherwise seems denied to her (83-4). In Ravensong the representation of Raven and Cedar as active agents of the catastrophe of a flu epidemic within the story and Celia's vision of a Native community's first contact with Europeans (10) create the impression of mythic and historic realities that coexist alongside Stacey's own reality. These culturally charged moments in specific "fictional" contexts present the supernatural juxtaposed against the natural: what Chanady identifies as a syncretism of *supercivilization* and *primitive savagism* . But while the representation of a mythic reality as part of a fictional realism at first seems to support such distinctions, the fantastic or improbable nature of visions and beings in both of these novels should perhaps be considered quite normal in reference to the cultures that they portray. Specifically, in reference to the Tricksters in both novels — Nanapush in Tracks and Raven in Ravensong - whose nature it is to be improbable, fantastic and troublesome, such distinctions between the realistic and the fantastic are not appropriate.

Tracks and Ravensong can then be read to resist a categorical containment by the term *Magic Realism.* Stephen Slemon, in "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse" (1988), argues that this term

> can itself signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems and more monumental theories of literary practice, a way of suggesting that there is something in the nature of the literature it identifies that confounds the capacities of the major genre systems to come to terms with it. (10)

He acknowledges the oxymoronic nature of this term that suggests a binary opposition between representations of realism and fantasy, but he argues that this feature of magic realist texts can be read as a post-colonial discourse providing new "codes of recognition" through which silenced and marginalized voices might be heard (21). While *Magic Realism* is not

usually considered a literary genre it does exploit this polarity of literary expectations. Yet, applying the term *Magic Realism* relies on the willingness of readers to accept distinctions of realism and the fantastic even while such a mode of writing tries to blend or distort them. These distinctions that Magic Realism exploits are paradoxically what makes this mode of writing possible, the codes of reading and literary convention which I as a reader have learned to interpret, or as Slemon has labeled them, "codes of recognition" (20). But this may not explain how a reader who is Ojibwe or West Coast Native would perceive these novels, or necessarily how Erdrich and Maracle have written them. These very categories that Magic Realism combines are not necessarily part of the assumptions which structure Tracks or Ravensong. In The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine In American Indian Traditions (1986, 1992) Paula Gunn Allen claims that defining the supernatural and fantastic against the ordinary and realistic is not appropriate to traditional Native Literatures. By extension, a contemporary novel which incorporates ritual or oral traditional material also might not fit into such a dichotomy. Allen argues that what European perception divides into the supernatural and the natural world are not perceived in such a dualistic division by Native Americans. Native American thought does not "draw a hard and fast line between what is material and what is spiritual, for it regards the two as different expressions of the same reality, as though life has twin manifestations that are mutually interchangeable" (60).

Finally, Tracks and Ravensong might be read as sites of conflict between the different cultural languages employed in their narratives. Consistent in these two novels is the portrayal of oral storytelling as a social and cultural act in which the narrative world of a particular oral tradition begins to infiltrate and interact with the narrative worlds presented in Tracks and Ravensong. This is what Bakhtin might categorize as polyglossia — "[the] simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system" (431). If Tracks and Ravensong are to be considered hybrids of oral and literary

narrative modes, then they can also be read and heard to implicate each other and animate each other. Nanapush's *Rain Story* in Tracks and the *Snot Woman* story in Ravensong are not mere entertainments of fantastical or improbable nature but also social explanations / interpretations within specific contexts. As such, they can be considered as normal, typical and indicative of the world they are meant to represent and signify, not absurdities or improbabilities given a realistic portrayal.

But can Tracks and Ravensong be considered to exhibit polyglossia or heteroglossia as Bakhtin has applied them? He seems to have a very broad definition of language that includes not only the more commonly known terms of *heteroglossia, polyglossia, monoglossia* but concepts of *alien language* — that is, a language that is not one's own — or *social language*[4] that distinguishes a specific social class or group within a society (430). His idea of a national language is defined by linguistic unities with coherent grammatical and semantic systems (Russian, German, English, etc.). But Tracks and Ravensong are written in English with very few distinctive cultural linguistic markers that can be relied on to distinguish the representation of an oral text or tradition. An adjustment in the application of these terms is required. In this case, Bakhtin's distinction between literary and extra-literary heteroglossia is analogous to the distinction between literary and oral texts (390-9) and so the juxtaposition of competing narratives in Tracks and narrative disclosure and narrative silences in Ravensong might be read to resemble *heteroglossia*. Extending this further, heteroglossia becomes evident in how Tracks and Ravensong both fictionally represent the act of oral storytelling. And, in so far as it can be demonstrated that both novels may exhibit oral

[4] Social language may also be used to define distinctions of race , as well as culture and class. The tensions between Stacey and Steve exhibited in the quotation on page 101 are those of cultural disparities that existed between them. But this can be linked to the racial concerns surrounding the flu epidemic and the lack of medical aid to Stacey's village demonstrates that to be Indian is to be second class. In this case a racial distinction is also a class distinction.

traditional literary features, the terms "polyglossia" and "heteroglossia" can perhaps be used to refer to cultural markers and not linguistic markers that are present in these two novels.

As an outsider to the cultures being fictionally portrayed in these two novels I have attempted to identify some of these *cultural* markers by drawing on the appropriate ethnological and anthropological material. But this presents its own problems. Behind such an endeavor lies the assumption that these two novels represent a cultural syncretism that combines and manipulates elements of an oral culture within a literary genre. Such an assumption is not without precedent. In The Conquest of America (1984), Tzvetan Todorov examines the conquest of Mexico beginning with Columbus' discovery of the Americas and the subsequent colonization. He argues that some of the historical figures involved, Cortes, Cabeza de Vaca, La Casas, Diego Durán, demonstrate varying degrees of cultural hybridity in their writing due to their interaction with those they colonized: Aztecs and the surrounding indigenous cultures. Tracks and Ravensong perhaps represent a similar cultural hybridity, but, instead of a foreigner arriving and infiltrating a culture for the purpose of disassembling it, the authors of these two novels may have a more ambiguous position in regards to cultures that they fictionally depict. Racially they have a vested interest in what they are writing about: Erdrich is Ojibwe and German and Maracle is Metís. And yet being literate, they might also be read to be taking part in a reverse infiltration of the cultures they depict.

Furthermore, to take anthropological and ethnological materials, as I have done in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis, and apply them to Tracks and Ravensong requires at the very least an acknowledgment that such material has in its turn been part of a literary process of cultural co-option, appropriation and reassessment. As Trinh T. Minh-ha argues concerning Claude Lévi-Strauss, "writing cannot cross (out or over) writing without questioning the material (here, language) that defines it and, second, that anthropology

which expresses itself in discourse cannot remain unaware (or willingly ignorant) of the 'nature' of discourse" (60). To deny this is to deny the meta-textual nature of writing which perpetuates the transmutation of the very things being observed and fictionally represented.

> "Looking for the structure of their narratives" so as to "tell it the way they tell it" is an attempt at remedying [the] ignorance of other ways of telling and listening (and obviously, at re-validating the nativist discourse). In doing so, however, rare are those who realize that what they come up with is not "structure of their narratives" but a reconstruction of the story that, at best, makes a number of its functions appear. Rare are those who acknowledge the unavoidable transfer of values in the "search" and admit that "the attempt will remain largely illusory..." (142)

Arguing against an anthropologist's concern with the structural features of narrative, *the how of a story's telling*, Minh-ha claims that such a preoccupation imposes a foreign set of categories and expectations on the act of storytelling despite any intention not to do so. "It is a commonplace for those who consider the story to be just a story to believe that, in order to appropriate the "traditional" storytellers' powers and to produce the same effects as theirs, it suffices to "look" for the structure of their narratives " (141). Read from this perspective, Tracks and Ravensong are reduced to examples of anthropological fictions, novels that are exotic merely because of the exotic nature of the cultures they depict. Behind this argument lies the assumption that the *civilized* mind has classified many of the realities that it does not understand in the categories of the *untrue* or *superstitious* , turning the storytelling event from a dynamic community event into an object lesson for readers wishing to indulge in the *fantastic* and the *improbable*.

If novels which demand such adjustment in their reading can be said to have post-modern or post-colonial sensibilities, then they fall within a wider creative literary discourse that

includes a variety of works. Other examples of *Native literature* may also require a reassessment of the reading strategies that might normally be employed. Thomas King's Green Grass, Running Water, for example, deliberately mixes up narratives — historical, biblical, literary and oral — in a way that might confuse the reader who attempts to construct a linear narrative of it. The interweaving and warping of numerous narratives such as Melville's Moby Dick - transformed into a *Big Black Lesbian Whale* named *Moby Jane* - with the internment of the *picture drawing* Apaches, Kiowas, Comanches at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida[5], the Old Testament *Flood Story* and a truly jealous christocentric God / Dog who would rather be a trickster like Coyote (if only he [God] read his own Bible he might realize he was / is) foil any attempt to construct a linear cause and effect fabula. Tomson Highway's use of both Cree and English in his plays defies an easy cultural categorization forcing the audience to consider linguistic degrees of access. Are his plays meant for a Cree audience, an English audience or both? The linguistic implications of these bilingual dramas also point to a cultural literary hybridity that plays against simplistic interpretation and categorization. Specifically, The Rez Sisters (1988) and Drylips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing (1989) theatrically mix up Bingo, Hockey, the Trickster Nanabush, and images of Christianity in ways that also defy a linear reading and reception. Images of God in high heels and a dress, shitting on a toilet, and Nanabush as a female trickster figure, tend to confuse audiences' (Native or European) expectations concerning the representation

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[5] Karen Daniels Petersen, Plains Indian Art From Fort Marion (1971), documents the military internment of the *notorious hostiles* of Kiowas, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho and later Apache who ignored the artificial boundaries of reservations and continued a nomadic way of life following dwindling buffalo herds, stealing horses and carrying out raids on enemies. Her book documents the art work and painting done by the Native peoples who suffered this internment. Herbert Welsh in his capacity as the corresponding secretary of the Office of the Indian Rights Association reported on the physical conditions of The Apache Prisoners in Fort Marion (1887) who later joined the internment at Fort Marion and documented some of the events surrounding the surrender of Geronimo, with letters and interviews.

of deity and the supernatural.[6] Similarly, E. Pauline Johnson's poetry and short stories defy easy categorization. While her writing is stylistically imbued with the romanticism of the previous century, its political and cultural content are problematic to anyone who would slot her into a classification and then shelve her. And her own racial hybridity and the hybridity portrayed in her costumed performances[7] present the problem of race / cultural politics well in advance of Erdrich's and Maracle's own writing. These authors are just a few Canadian examples of a wider literary phenomenon that includes D'Arcy McNickle, Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, Lucy Tapahanso, Beth Brant, Louise Halfe, Ruby Slipperjack, and the list goes on.

Paula Gunn Allen argues that it might be more appropriate to understand such literature as being divided into the ceremonial or mythic and the popular as opposed to a more mechanistic division of prose and poetry. This type of categorization might be understood as classifying literature according to its function as opposed to its form (61-72). Such an understanding focuses on the relationships that are evoked by a text (social interpersonal relationships of a community, or a community's relationships with the cosmic) instead of the individual's relationship to an object, or externally imposed. The question then becomes: *What does Native literature do?* instead of *What is Native literature?*

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[6] see footnote #6 in "Chapter four: Ensuing Silences" concerning male tricksters. In my literary encounters with Wîsakîcak and Nanabush, Cree and Ojibwe Tricksters respectively, they tend to be male figures. The exceptions are those recent creative literary efforts of Tomson Highway and Beth Brant and Lee Maracle. In regards to Dry Lips Ougtha Move to Kapuskasing (1989), the constant defensive laughter I observed in an audience, during the October 24 - November 17, 1990 Manitoba Theatre Centre Warehouse production, indicated that many were extremely uncomfortable with the blending of Native spirituality, christocentric *Madonna imagery*, and nudity on stage. This was particularly evident during the *striptease dream sequence* scene (85-88).

[7] In reading performances of her poetry Johnson would typically present one half of her performance in European civilian dress. During the other half she would dress in buckskin to recite her poems about *Indian* life. Citing the November 1892 edition of the Toronto Globe, Betty Keller documents that "This was the costume that she would wear for the Indian half of

More specifically, what can Tracks and Ravensong be read to be doing? They can be read as more than "written" textual interpretations of an oral world. These novels seems to disrupt any reading that tries to box them into categories of protest literature, Magic Realism, or as examples of a kind of anthropological fiction. Such readings are dialectical and they tend to break down once they are read at more than a superficial level. Reading Tracks and Ravensong as examples of political protest divides readers into categories of *us* and *them.* Consequently, they are restricted to talking and writing about issues of cultural prejudice and appropriation in literature in ways that result in a re-inscribing of the highly problematic terms of *Native, Indian, Métis, Mestizo, Half Breed,* or *Half Blood.* Read as magic realistic literature, the elements of traditional oral material in Tracks and Ravensong are reduced to entertainments of fantastical or improbable nature. The cultural significance of Nanapush's *Rain Story* in Tracks and the *Snot Woman* story in Ravensong as being normal, typical and indicative of the world they are meant to represent is then lost. Such a reading is only possible as long as those constructing them accept the literary distinctions between realism and the fantastic by which Magic Realism is able to operate. A reader with a knowledge of Ojibwe or West Coast Tlingit, or Tsimshian culture would not view such categories as mutually exclusive. To read Tracks and Ravensong as anthropological fictions is to turn them into literature which is of interest merely because it is different and displays a heteroglossia of cultural markers without coming to any understanding of the complex nature of the cultural hybridity that they exhibit. While the cultural specificity of these novels is emphasized, such a preoccupation may blind a reader to the paradox of culturally specific voices being subjected to literary containment. It then glosses over the ways in which oral and literary narrative modes can be read and heard to implicate each other and animate each other.

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her show for the remainder of her stage career." (66)

Ultimately, all of these reading strategies are useful, but no one in particular strategy is sufficient to explore all of the possibilities that Tracks and Ravensong and other novels like them present. Strictly dialectical approaches to reading Native literature puts in place impassable barriers and contradictions that do not account for the fluidity of narrative and cultural exchange that such novels present. And this brings me back to the question posed by Paula Gunn Allen: What ceremonial or mythic functions can such literature be read to perform in its relationships to communities? Or, as Thomas King states in his introduction to All My Relations (1990):

> I said that Native literature — that is, written Native literature — has opened up new worlds of imagination for a non-Native audience. It is not that we have consciously set out to do this. It is, rather, a by-product of the choices (i.e. not writing historical novels) we have made as writers and as Natives. The two major choices that we have made so far are concerned with the relationship between oral literature and written literature and with the relationship between Native people and the idea of community, and the stories in this volume, to a great extent, reflect these choices. (xii)

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